Call of Wells Fargo
A Crime Novel

Foreword by Nigel Goodswallow
Introduction by Nemo Krad
2nd Introduction by Sean Nelson

“I don’t understand my genius. In fact,
I doubt its existence”
-Girlfriend Farmer

In dedication to the posters of /lit/

Foreword

I was introduced to G. Farmer in a strange time under even stranger circumstances. It was close to 4 in the morning when I was at my "second office" in the backbooth of my local 24/7 McDonald's restaurant and chanced received a curious email that prevented me from finding my pre-breakfast rush nap. Mr. Farmer, through a slew of spelling errors, informed me that he had written a book made of his "own *angiuish put to pepper."* This was the line that tempted me to look deeper into his story and I will ever be thankful for so strange a line.

Mr. Farmer was inquiring for someone to conduct an interview with him and his new book. A book, I should add, which has since been removed from Amazon and banned from appearing on in-store bookshelves in several countries. How he found my email he was vague on and aggressive when I pressed on the question. I suspect after some surface level google searches he likely found

one of my old BuzzFeed articles. Whatever the case, I was chosen.

I agreed to run a general interview through a voice call with Mr. Farmer and twelve hours after that first email he had what he wanted. He insisted I send him the audiofile and what became of it I still don't know. What I recall was his persistence in being known as a "quiet minority" and affirming that his book was about "airlines and ducks." There are no ducks in his book.

All this was my introduction to the man who revealed his first name to be "Girlfriend" in that bizarre call. Later that night, within the 24 hour span of learning of his existence, Mr. Farmer was emailing me again. This time asking to meet in person. As it turned out, and as Mr. Farmer already knew, we were in the same city. So we agreed to meet at my McDonald's and would perform a more in depth interview. By this point? I simply wanted to see what the man looked like.

I wasn't impressed as expected. Mr. Farmer rolled into the parking lot in his red S-10 pickup truck (which he claimed to sleep in because of his back) and the next thing I knew I was greeted by a (white) out of shape 30s something man. He promised to pay for my meal until we discovered a minute later his wallet was misplaced (later

rediscovered in his pocket by the end of the interview).

If it was one thing I noticed in our first interview, and then confirmed in our french fry filled second, it was Mr. Farmer's total lack of cohesion as a human being. As with the first, I yielded no fruits from the second interview. Other than Mr. Farmer's love for Shakespere due to pencil-sword fighting when reading aloud MacBeth in high school. I should mention Mr. Farmer claimed to have no education in our first interview.

The second interview mostly consisted of a one way conversation about a video game series called Persona. Mr. Farmer, in detail beyond my memory, recited the development history of Atlus' games before stuffing his pockets with ketch-up packets and leaving abruptly when management noticed. I have not found success in publishing the second interview.

Suffice to say, I know very little about Mr. Farmer. My third and final interaction with the man was to write this little foreword for his second book. Rolling up my sleeves this time, I took to researching the impacts of Mr. Farmer's debut work. What I learned from my findings is that one doesn't need to understand Mr. Farmer's character.

They need only look at the product his eccentricity churns out. A product that has inspired its own cult following.

According to Mr. Farmer, his book sold millions of copies. This I can't confirm nor dispute given its removal from retailers. He also claims his first book was a New York Times Best-Seller but no list I've come across confirms this. Instead, those few who have managed to secure copies of his original work (Non-Mr. Farmer sources suggest these rare books are worth $10,000,000) hold the man in very high esteem. For such an odd man to be so sung about on online forums is, in my estimate, something of a 21st century miracle. Never before have I seen a man make such a splash and promptly leave so cluelessly and immediately.

I cannot say with certainty that Mr. Farmer is a pop sensation like others would claim him to be. I can say, however, and in the interest of suggesting one might want to look into this man's work, he is no doubt indeed a pop fascination. Is what he writes parody? Satire? Comedy? The beauty about Mr. Farmer is simple. Your guess is about as good as mine.

-Nigel Goodswallow

Introduction by Nemo Krad

Let us be frank up front about the nature of the tome in question. The author has long been speculated to be a seasoned practitioner of the occult, the arcane, the strange. *G. Farmer* is no mere writer. No fortune teller and no conspiracy theorist. He is a visitor to our world, passing by briefly to lay clues toward some unknown that we (The Career Paraneers/CP) have dedicated our professional lives into uncovering. G. Farmer is a man of vast seriousness who we are sincerely devoted to understanding.

To first begin understanding Call of Wells Fargo one will have to do their homework and devour the contents of Farmer's previous work… which serves as an exemplary source of decoding the hidden meanings therein. It was no parody as some have suggested. Looking at the work more closely one can ascertain the truth… G. Farmer is speaking to us between the lines. Realizing this brings some clarity as to why the book was so

swiftly censored by the powers that be upon its release.

Upon our first few readings of G. Farmer's breakout novel, we were able to sense, radiating from the very pages, that there was a deeper mystery afoot. Deeper than the superficial contents of the story's so-called plot. When breaking down the text of that first book, it's clear that 90% of the content is purely referential. Yet to what extent? Names of characters from other media? Homages to old television series? That's all there. But we learned to ask ourselves. *Why* does the protagonist kiss a crossdresser on the beach? What *does* G. Farmer mean when the protagonist goes off shooting up an elementary school with an assault rifle?

An example of one hidden twist we have discovered thus far. The monstrous pig-man Nesmer is the pilot of the novel's cursed plane. The protagonist calls out in horror, "a pig is flying the plane." This is a simple reference to the phrase, "when pigs fly." As it is revealed later, they were never flying to begin with.

Perhaps the above is just foreshadowing, one might speculate. A darker mystery uncovered then. The first book is 30,071 words divided between 15 chapters. Dividing those numbers in

actuality equals 2004. G. Farmer is asking the reader to look into what happened in 2004 with a certain airline. The answer? *Do your own research.* The contents of that particular item would not be allowed in print. Such is the case with many of G. Farmer's structures holding the book together.

Another mystery. Near the end of the book there is sudden mention of a character who had no bearing on the events of the story. The character of Herod is likely named after Herod the Great, an ancient king of Judea. According to the characters of the book, Herod was destined to become a shadow master of the United States, selecting three of the nation's presidents by 2070 before he was slain. All this is mentioned suspiciously out of nowhere. Is this a warning from G. Farmer? As we have learned. When certain lines become suspicious: *We look into them;* just as pigs don't fly.

We are aware that it's never so simple as the first letters of sentences spelling out secret codes. Yet it remains true that the works of G. Farmer invokes readers to ask what it is they are reading. Going forward as the reader journeys into the horrors that lie within the depths of Wells Fargo, we encourage frequent pauses to reflect; why? Why is this happening? What is G. Farmer really

trying to tell us? To answer these questions it is our pleasure to welcome you to the world of Call of Wells Fargo.

Introduction by Sean Nelson

As it turns out the whacko who wrote this book felt one introduction wasn't enough so he called upon a philosophy student to add on another. For some reason. I was assured whatever I wrote would be put into the book so I'm not holding anything back. You asked for this, Farmer.

Call of Wells Fargo is a trilogy of POVs all in one. A crime novel featuring the detective, the psychopath, and the guy in over his head. The story begins with Frank, a struggling writer trying to make it big online, who is forced by his opulent father to get a job at the local Wells Fargo bank. On the first day of his job he mistakenly causes a variance of forty thousand dollars and desperately seeks to correct it at great risk of harm to himself and those around him. The bloodthirsty psychopath is sent after him, there's a fat detective with a soft side who gets involved, and a comedy of errors ensues.

It's basically the ensemble cast from last time plus a few names Farmer didn't get around to with his first book. Having read the previous introduction I feel like it's my duty to say it's

completely wrong and there are no hidden messages in this book or the former. Going farther than that, there's nothing esoteric going on here. Or new grounds being broken for that matter. It's a crime novel. A bad one at that. I should really stress that now. Yes, it's a parody to some extent. The same with the airplane book.

Also, while I'm at it, I should say with some authority Farmer didn't mean for the first book to be weaponized by other whackos on the internet. Just as there's no secret messages, Krad, there was never serious malicious intent. It was a joke book. People took a joke book and shafted it into a spear. Then the joke book was banned and made a martyr. The internet is a ridiculous place and this book here is just proof of it.

Seriously, I'm using my time here to stop you from wasting yours. If you see this book, in its likely limited lifespan, on Amazon or something and you're reading the preview then stop now. Do not waste your hard earned money on this crap. Farmer is a conman in the sense he's packaging what is effectively fanfiction and presenting it as a parody or crime novel or whatever. It's crap is what it is.

There's nothing interesting going forward. Frank goes to jail and the psychopath gets away.

The detective shrugs impotently and goes, “well that’s life. Donut?” It’s that gritty crime movie schlock probably done better on Netflix. These story beats should be familiar to you.

If your parents are alive then go visit or call them right now instead of reading this book. If there’s a girl you like then let me be the guy to tell you to go ask her to see a movie that you want to see. Take her to a show, man. Just ask her. Do anything besides read this book. You’ve got one life and your time doesn’t belong here.

This is your last warning. I know at some point parody can mutate until it is its own thing but this book doesn’t justify it. Stop reading. It’s not going to get any better on the next page.

Frank One

Frank was as snuggly as ever when the invasive sound of knocking came to his door. Under no circumstance had Frank allowed for his bedroom door to ever be so aggressively pounded on, as it was now. “Can you keep it down” Frank cries as he sits up from his snuggly nest of blankets and comfy pillows, regrettably forgetting the nice dream he was having. Knights and maidens and dragons had filled his head but now there was only the annoying pounding of fist on mahogany.

“Young Master Frank” came the accented voice from behind the door, indicating to Frank it was the family butler who came to wake him up. “On what pretense has HE come to wake me up” Frank wondered angrily and eyed his digital clock, seeing it was still the early hour of 2:00pm. Usually nobody ever bothered Frank until supper as that was his breakfast but something told Frank this wasn’t pertaining to his food.

“Forgive me, Young Master” says the butler who sounds like he was from an African country over in Africa. Raising his body sluggishly off his bed, Frank says “Are you aware what time is, Hairy?” As it turned out, Hairy did, “Yes, Young Master, your father asked to see you in his study at once, sir” Hairy says. “No, that can’t be right” Frank says, stretching away his sleeping pains from his long and restful slumber “father never

asks to see me in his study." Keen as Frank was on returning to his sleep, or just getting onto his day early as it was, Hairy did not relent and so Frank thought it best to humor Daddy dearest.

Walking by the grand mirror down the hall, Frank studies the reflection with pleasure. He was devilishly handsome, more than his mother had assured him he was. Sharp chin, smooth forehead, and just the right amount of curls, in his hair. Then there were his eyes "Like Shark eyes" as Daddy always said. "What could Daddy want with me that's so important?" Frank ponders as he enters the study. Had he asked for something lately that Daddy finally managed to get his hands on? He could not remember for the life of him.

Daddy dearest sat in his favorite Victorian chair from one of their long passed ancestors, Frank didn't remember which one. "Another Frank" he thought as he entered the room with the many tall bookshelves. Daddy was reading the newspaper before the authentic football Bears bear rug and the crackles of the digital fire fireplace. Daddy looked much like Frank, except for a few more handsome wrinkles and a handsome thick mustache. Frank wished he could have a mustache like Daddy but him and facial hair weren't exactly buddy buddy. Daddy always wore a striped black business suit, much in contrast to Frank's striped pajamas.

"You wanted to see me, Daddy?" Frank asks, hands put in front of his body like he always

did when speaking to his father. Daddy didn't look away from his paper as he spoke to Frank "How goes the book sales son?" "Oh right" Frank thought privately to himself "the book sales" he had almost forgotten. "Very well, Daddy. People talk about me all the time online, I'm really doing great and I'm very popular ha-ha" Daddy flipped the page of his newspaper "To be popular does not mean to be successful."

Frank averted eye contact before it could be made, luckily Daddy dearest was more interested in the sports section "Oh um, well sales are really good, Daddy" Daddy flipped to the next page "I had Hairy look into those sales. Turns out they're all freely available online" Frank could feel the dagger in his back twisting painfully "Ha-ha, is that right? I didn't know. The reviews though…" Another flip of the page "I gave you a lot of money for the reviews, as I recall. It appears all those robots didn't do so well" Daddy says "They're called bots actually" Upon that remark Daddy dearest looked sharply at Frank and Frank looked down to his luxury slippers in shame.

"Money is why I called you here today" Daddy dearest says, returning to his attention to his paper "you've sunk a lot of it on your personal ventures" Those personal ventures were actually part of a deal Frank struck with his father. A few years ago he promised Daddy dearest "Let me become a writer! I'll figure it out! Let me become a world famous author and I won't need to get a

real job!" Now a few years later Daddy dearest was dreadfully reminding poor Frank of that conversation, a conversation Frank had prayed to God his father had forgotten "I gave you ample time to make something of yourself. I even invested heavily in your pursuits but it doesn't appear they have borne any fruit son."

Frank was getting sweaty, eyeing the tall window to the backyard maze, half thinking he was lost in a maze with where the conversation was going, and half thinking he should jump through the window now "One more book, Daddy" Frank said. When Frank first began writing he had only done it to get his father off his back about finding a job. "I'll be my own boss this way, Daddy" Frank had insisted. The books he wrote were, well, to quote the jerks on the internet (who were very wrong mind you) they came off as unedited pre-kindergarten gibberish. But Frank didn't care, as his editing showed, because it was never about making a profit, it was about getting Daddy off his back already! Too bad Daddy was looking for his return.

"No more, son" Daddy dearest flipped another page "you're getting up there in age. It's time you found a job" Frank's heart skipped a beat "A job? But I'm only thirty!" Frank cried, hoping Daddy dearest would understand how much he didn't want to have to work for a living, especially given all the money his parents already had! "Did I ever tell you how I came into my money, my boy?"

Frank was ready to gag, he knew *the story* was coming “I was in the third grade” Daddy dearest began the story that Frank was sick to death of hearing “my teacher told me if I wanted to excel in life… I would have to open an excel document. I took that advice to heart, son. So by the time I was in fourth grade I was already a millionaire.”

Frank let out a loud yawn “Homp! Hrrmpf, mmm. Uh-huh, you’ve told me before, Daddy” Daddy was about to flip the page but stopped mid flip once he heard Frank’s yawn. Then Daddy said “Have you given it any thought at all what you will do with your life?” Frank crossed his arms in thought “Well, I was thinking maybe I could start an online magazine. I’d have to pay other writers a small sum by the page but I estimate… let me think about it” Frank didn’t think about it “I could turn a hundred times profit on it!”

Daddy dearest folded his paper and stood from his chair. He walked up to Frank and slapped him across the face. Already hot tears were flushing themselves down Frank’s cheek when Daddy said “You’re running out of time, Frank. You better figure it out soon” Daddy began to leave the study. At the door he looked back to his teary eyed son and said “I’m off to meet with the mayor now. He inquired about you but I took the liberty of telling him you’re indisposed with a base case of hemorrhoids. Best get to your job search, my boy.”

“Oh crumbs” Frank sniffled “I always feared this day would come, I don’t want to work a job! If I work a job I won’t be able to make the fullest use of my free time! I’d be too tired to play video games and the anime! How would I ever keep up with all my anime? Did he even consider all this? This is utterly unfair! I feel like I’m no better than a child being sent to the cola mines!”

Frank finds himself being enveloped in despair, a despair, much like a hunter in olden times finding themselves in a blizzard after falling into a freezing river after stepping into a bear trap after having a bad case of diarrhea whose girlfriend just left him, this was all to say Frank wasn’t feeling very good about his position. As he was being swallowed by this despair, Hairy the butler, who was a very hairy butler, appears at the door to the study “Excuse me, Young Master” he says like a posh butler but also bearded.

“Leave me alone, Hairy! It’s your fault I’m in this mess anyway since you told Daddy about those sales” Frank hollers before turning his back on the family butler. There is a very tense moment between the two and imaginably a dramatic shot where Frank stands on one side of the room with Hairy at the other and the fireplace between them.

Hairy gives Frank a moment and then says in a mysterious voice “Young Master, I understand your father has tasked you with finding gainful employment. As it just so happens, I have heard, of an enterprise hiring in town” A new enterprise,

hiring in town? Frank gave a curious look, showing that, he was curious “Hairy, no offense, but if this is a butler gig then the answer is no. Serving others is sort of beneath me.”

Hairy gives a suspicious look toward the way Frank’s father went before walking up to Frank himself “Young Master, this is not butler work. Have you heard of Wells Fargo?” Frank hadn’t “Wells Fargo? What the heck is that?” Hairy explains “It’s a bank. A large one apparently. A… prestigious bank” Frank thinks about it “A prestigious bank? Daddy would be happy if I work somewhere prestigious” Hairy smiles “Yes! I mean, yes, and surely one that offers a challenge for a competitive rascal such as yourself” Frank didn’t like the sound of challenge “Ehh…” Hairy switched course “I mean, for someone as skillful as you, Young Master, the job would no doubt be a breeze!”

Prestigious AND easy? “I could probably find time to watch anime there too” Frank thinks “Alright, Hairy. I guess I can try bank work. Once Daddy sees I can handle a job he’ll probably get off my back. Then maybe after a month once I prove my point that I can handle a job things can go back to normal” The idea of it was beginning to actually excite Frank “I might even make Daddy proud! Imagine that, Daddy thanking me!”

Hairy bowed submissively “Yes, Young Master, a very wise plan. Here” Hairy reached into his butler vest to retrieve a black card with a gold

text that almost seemed to glow “A hiring card” Frank squinted at what Hairy was offering him “A hiring card?” Hairy blinks away for a split second “Ah, forgive me, I forget you are new to the hiring process. A hiring card is a proof of resourcefulness if acquired for certain businesses. It basically means somebody from inside the business has already recommended you. Take it and consider yourself already hired, young master!”

Frank was ready to snatch the card like a hungry dog but then thought aloud “But wait, how does a butler get a hiring card for a swanky bank?” Hairy shuttered, but for only a moment “Ah! It was when I was butlering for one of the bankers. They said I had good judgment and I’d be on the lookout for quality candidates. After all, who better to find such candidates than a butler to great families such as yours?” This made absolute perfect sense to Frank “This makes absolute perfect sense” Frank said and he took up the card from Hairy who humbly bowed away as all butlers should.

Frank scurried to his bedroom, mysterious Wells Fargo hiring card in hand. He looks at the card and it reads “WELLS FARGO Hiring card. Turn in for consideration of employment. Criminal record will not be inquired upon surrender of card” Frank shrugs “Gee, that’s strange. It sounds like they’d hire even serial killers at Wells Fargo as long as they could secure this card. Oh well, that doesn’t matter, once I get my job there. Hairy was right to trust me with this card. I bet I’ll be able to

really generate profits and productivity for the company. I am very skillful after all, even if most can't see it ha-ha"

Frank flips over the card "What's this? A link?" The link read "https://www.wellsfargo.com/about/careers/our-hiring-process/secret-page" Frank types the link into the url on his high end gaming computer and sure enough a page loads. The page displays what looks like a reptilian face wearing a red hood with yellow eyes. A red circle loads around it but the circle looks like a snake eating its own tail. It doesn't take long to load and the strange symbol disappears "Well that was strange but it looks like I've got an address now" Sure enough, Frank did! There was an address and time for tomorrow. Feeling smug and like an elite hacker hitting the jackpot, Frank says to himself "I'm in."

Woolston One

“Call me Woolston.” Those were the words spoken to the one he thought was the most beautiful woman in the world. One child and one divorce later, he still thought she was. Now it had been some months since he had last spoken to her and he felt that time, pressing into his skin, like a sheet of steel over an already fresh wound. God it hurt to be away from her. God where did it all go so wrong?

The leaves were changing when they had last spoken. Now winter was setting in early. November snow was blanketing the city and the chumps on the weather channel were saying ‘the cold was just getting warmed up.’ “What a bunch of assholes,” Woolston grunted, blaming the news reporters for the weather, as he opened a beer at his desk. He was at work but where else in the world would a man be so driven to drink so much? The life of a detective was a thirsty life. Detective Woolston was a thirsty man.

It had been a long day at the office. *Again*. “Tricky” Rick J. O’Lewis Woolston, or Wooly to boys of the precinct, was a number of things. A bastard to the many criminals he had put behind bars in his day. A mean bastard to the other boys in blue, especially when he got to his drinking. A dirty mean son of a rat bastard to Channel 4 News, who he’d take many an empty can of beer to chug

at after their nightly negative report of the city police. This was all to say Woolston was, well, a bastard. “Sheila saw me as something else…” he thought sadly, and drunkenly, as he kicked back his latest beer.

He was more than a bastard once, yes. A hard boiled detective by profession. He still was that, under all his well-built weight. A big guy for most criminals, with an affinity for cinnamon donuts that swirled just like the hair off his seasoned pompadour. But first and foremost Woolston would tell you he’s a loving husband and father. It was too bad he and the misses weren’t living in the same house anymore and that he was instead living in his wreck of an office. He missed Sheila and the little one. But duty calls.

“Duty blows,” Woolston said, sitting back in his chair, causing it to creak from years of strain. He dropped his heavy shoes on top of his cluttered desk as the ceiling fan spun slower than he would have liked. It was snowing out but in his office it was somehow sweltering. “Damn heaters going on the fritz again, how’s anyone supposed to think in a climate like this?” Getting back to that first thing: He was a detective. A great one back in the day. But as the city got worse, Woolston got drunker.

He was merely buzzed now as he sat back and watched his small glass screen TV flash before him. He was eager to catch the latest city news report so he could get angry at the reporters. Until then however, Woolston was subject to a beauty

model showing off a new line of French dresses, “Remember,” the woman says seductively, “if it’s Labuschagne then it *has* to be good.” A sadness crept up on Woolston, “Sheila would have looked good in that dress.”

The commercial ends and the news returns, washing away Woolston’s sadness with anger. The reporter behind the thick rimmed glasses began to speak, “Welcome back. I’m Chester Colt and we return to today’s top story. Billionaire tech juggernaut Elroy Melonbust revealed on social media today that his mysterious project known only as ‘Project PP’ will be unveiled to the world later this week.”

“PP my ass,” Woolston grumbled. “If that guy is so smart, why doesn’t he get rid of the cold? Ah, seriously,” Woolston groaned, using today’s grand larceny case to fan himself against the heat, “I ask to not freeze to death in my office and the chief installs the devil’s anus for a heater. I swear he’s doing it to get rid of me. It’s a damn conspiracy. The chief is as bad as this chump from Channel 4. Hmm,” Woolston eyed the paper he was using as a fan. “Wait, this case is from today.”

Out of reflex, Woolston looked at his phone on his desk. He cut the wire but he knew, he could feel, someone was trying to reach him. He had a real gut instinct for his line of work. He could taste bullshit the moment it spewed into the air. He could also taste the cheap beer on his breath. “Oh shit,” he cried, knowing full well what was

coming. He stashed his open beer in a drawer just as a shadow appeared before his door and began pounding on it.

"Just a minute," Woolston yelled, standing from his chair, looking frantically across the floor for where he had misplaced his pants. The figure pounded on the door, and called out, "Detective Woolston!? Detective Woolston!" Woolston flipped over his inflated mattress and threw on his old slacks, "Just a minute, God damn it," Woolston cried. The figure pounded on the door some more, "Quit jacking off in there, Wooly. Chief wants you." Woolston lazily adjusted his flamingo tie, "Fuck you and the fuck the cheif." "Fuck you," the figure responded.

Woolston knew the figure on the other side of the door wouldn't leave until he did so as well. He shoved his new case in the back of his pants, nestling the sleek papers between his buttcrack like a mother would hold their newborn. He then marched up to the door and flung it open to find Lt. Angels Boswell. "Wooly you fat fuck, took you long enough," Boswell said. "Awh blow it out your ass," Woolston said, slamming his office door shut. All things considered, this was a warm exchange between the two!

The precinct was abuzz like a beehive full of bees who were late for their jobs at the honey factory and they didn't want to feel the sting of the queen bee bitching them out again. There were some cops strapping on body armor at their desks,

taking bets on which of the rookies would be the first to be raped in the line of duty.[1] At another desk were more cops beating the starlights out of a car salesman dressed like Old Uncle Sam. A woman sitting in front of a room, waiting to be interrogated, had butterflies tattooed on her crossed legs. She blew smoke and flexed her eyebrows up as Woolston strode by. It was Tuesday, more or less.

A punk with a mohawk was being escorted beside Woolston and he cried out, “You pigs! Let me go, I didn’t even know what I did was against the law.” One of the officers dragging him sneered, “Calling us a pig when we found you at the Pig Pen? Gimmie a break!” Next to come across Woolston’s path was a redneck with a MAGAA hat, swinging a chair at several cops to keep them at bay. Woolston was not intimidated. Or amused for that matter. He B-lined for the redneck and the redneck saw him coming. Woolston used his mighty strength twice. Once to knock away the incoming chair at his head and the other to punch out the unruly hick. “We had it under control, Wooly,” one of the officers said before turning sheepish from Woolston’s wolfish glare.

Amid the chaos a phone began to ring at one of the desks. No doubt it was the phone of one of the officers busy taking selfies with the unconscious redneck. “If it’s one thing I hate it’s

[1] This is more common than you think; a phenomenon related to MILFs.

people who don't answer their phone," Woolston thought aloud. He stormed over to the desk and took up the phone, "Police. The fuck you want?" From the other end of the phone he heard a nervous voice, "Oh is this Wooly? It's officer Mancuso. I'm at the post off the highway. I was calling to confirm I've arrested that suspicious figure I found walking off the side of the road. Strangest thing though, no ID." Woolston sighed, "There's always ID, Mancuso. I'll leave a note you bagged a suspicious individual. Watch yourself if you're alone there." The voice became a little less nervous, "Ha, don't worry, Wooly. I'm not afraid of a man in cuffs." The call ended and Woolston left.

Woolston crossed the jungle from his office to the chief's. The door read 'Chief Hayes.' "More like chief pain in my ass," Woolston grumbled before barging in. Inside he found Hayes behind his desk, "Woolston, there you are," he closed the tabs on his computer. Hayes had a thin beard and frizzy short hair. He hid eyes behind a dark pair of shades but Woolston felt them burning marks into him as he walked up to the desk. Hayes had eyes unlike any other guy. They called it the 'Hayes Gaze' and even the shades offered a taste even though they concealed the eyes. "What's this about, Hayes?"

"I just got off the phone with the mayor, Woolston. He's not a happy camper. Not a happy camper at all. In fact, I'd say he's about as happy

as a camper who got eaten by a bear, right after the bear finished molesting him. Do you understand me, Woolston?" Woolston understood, "I take it the mayor isn't happy I was doing my job last night?" The eyes must have been mighty angry looking behind the shades, "You put the culprit in the hospital! Hayes cried. "It was self defense!" Woolston cried back. "You drove your car through a sushi bar!" "He was wearing a tracksuit, Chief. He was obviously a runner so I had to act quick."

Chief Hayes stood up with his face fuming, "You know what I think, Woolston? I think you like the thrill of putting yourself in danger and causing trouble. But that's not how we do things around here." Hayes pulled from his drawer a book titled 'The Book,' "Here, we do things by the book." Woolston was starting to fume himself, "Shove the book up your ass, Hayes. I went with my gut and we busted the guy for carrying coke." "Watch it, Woolston. Because you were a hot-head about it we couldn't make the charges stick," Hayes said. "Yea, well, there's one less dealer on the street is how I see it," Woolston said. "Damn it, Woolston! Were you drinking?" Woolston blinked away, "Uh, not at that point." Hayes grit his teeth together and yelled, "You're a loose cannon, Woolston! Enough is enough. I'm keeping you off the hot action cases from now on."

"You can't take me off the dangerous cases! That's where you need me most! Where do you get off, Hayes? Ah! I get it now. That's why you

pulled that larceny case out of your ass," Woolston said, quite literally pulling the case out from his own ass, and waving it at the chief. "You want me away from the drug dealers and gangs to work a boring numbers job."

"It'll be good for you, Woolston. You'll clear your head doing some old fashion detective work. Besides, the mayor is on my ass like you wouldn't believe with that sushi stunt. Moving you to less dangerous work was the best compromise I could make," Hayes said. "The mayor? You mean the mayor's *handler*, don't you?" Woolston said. Hayes sat back in his chair, "Yea, him. What's it matter? That man is sick of the crime in this city, Woolston. More than you and me, from what I hear. He wants change. Has plans to crackdown on crime himself. Maybe he'll run for office himself and then I'll have no chance in hell to save your ass. Speaking of the mayor's handler. It was him who insisted on giving you a new partner."

A new partner? Woolston couldn't believe it, "I can't believe it. A new partner? Me? Hayes, come on. You know what happened to my last partner…" Woolston paused dramatically. "...I don't do partners anymore." Hayes shot his glare at Woolston through his black as Arabian night shades, "You will if you want to keep your job. He's a fresh graduate from an elite academy. Supposed to be more trained and prepped than any of us. I need you to show him the ropes, *by the book*, and God willing he'll rub off on you and I

won't have to lose my voice hollering at you. I'm sick of it, Woolston. I'm supposed to be part of a quartet and I need my voice."

"Where is this *highly trained* chump anyway?" Woolston asked. "I'm right here," said a calm voice, "I've- I've actually been sitting here the entire time." Woolston looked to his immediate left and saw a man sitting in a chair beside the chief's desk who he was too drunk to have noticed before. The man wore a long black coat with a blank tie. His long hair was tied into a ponytail behind his head. He looked very no-nonsense to Woolston. Very no-fun.

"Woolston," Chief Hayes began, "this is…" The man stood and offered his hand to Woolston, "Inspector Krake. It's a pleasure to meet you, Detective Woolston." Woolston let the hand hang, "Hayes, this guy is a faggot." "Enough of your bullshit, Woolston! Krake is your partner and you two have a case. Get on it or you're fired!"

Woolson rolled his eyes at what he was hearing but the Hayes Gaze could bend even Woolston with enough pressure. Woolston looked at the paper in his hand and cringed, "Seriously, *those* guys? They're a bunch of creeps. Of course I get stuck with a partner and these weirdos. Just my luck."

Detective Woolston and Inspector Krake stepped out of Chief Hayes' office, "You might not be big on having a new partner but I can promise you I'll do all that I can to not be a burden to you.

Still, I suggest we waste no time solving this case, Detective," Krake said. There were days Woolston wished he could not have a job. He wished he could just spend his entire life doing nothing and not have to grind himself down for a job. But he knew such a life was not possible. He sighed, accepting his new shadow, and said, "Call me Woolston."

Frank Two

Cars were packed on the roads through the snowy city, but, at the imposing building Frank had been driven to, the parking lot seemed scarce, of them. Adventure, was what Frank thought of on the ride, for he had seldom left his home and enjoyed seeing the snow fall on all the city streets. Returning his eyes forward, now, all Frank could see was the office building of Wells Fargo. Dark and blocky, and sort of abstract looking compared to the rest of the city, the bank was separated from the rest of the world by its vast and empty parking lot and on top of the cold climate, it gave Frank an extra chill to look at.

"Look, Young Master" said Hairy, the family butler who had driven Frank out for the interview he had at Wells Fargo "there it is, your new job, I hope." It was somewhat of a spooky building with its weird shape and the fact it had no windows at all wasn't helping the nervous feeling inside Frank. Even though Frank had the hiring card Hairy had given him, he wasn't, so sure he would be hired. "Daddy will be very pleased, *if* they hire me" Frank said and Hairy only smiled.

Although Frank had tried to watch some YouTube videos demonstrating how to tie a tie, the art of it was lost on the man, who had up until this point in his life, had been too ahead of the curve to ever have to bother even learning to tie his shoes

“I’ll just say I’m not a tie kind of guy” Frank had decided after giving up midway through his second attempt, realizing the whole affair wasn’t going to really work out. He still made sure to dislike the tutorial video, just so they knew it wasn’t very up to snuff.

Frank stepped out of the car and met the cold. He wore a beige winter jacket with a black shirt, believing this gave him a rather, sophisticated look, without the tie “Shall I return to pick you up in an hour, Young Master? Or would you prefer to call me when you’re ready?” Frank frowned “What are you talking about, Hairy? You said you would be my driver today so you should wait here for me the entire time I’m in there” Frank says and the frown transports to Hairy’s face next “But, Young Master, I had errands to run in town while you’re in there” Hairy says “Be smart about this, like me, Hairy. It’s very cold out. What if I get to the front doors and the doors are locked just from how cold it is! If you had gone to get a slurpee or whatever it is you do on your off time, I could freeze to death out here!” Hairy bows his head, like a good butler, “Oh. Well, I *guess* if you put it like that, it makes sense.”

The Wells Fargo building appeared to only grow as Frank approached the monolithic structure “It’s so big and black” Frank just had to declare. The inside was even more impressive. A giant open space with slick black, possibly granite, walls, and intricate glowing red beams veining

along the walls, giving the place a sort of science fiction spaceship feeling, but in actuality, it was a bank. Fittingly enough, the giant letters inside the lobby read “Wells Fargo BANK OF THE FUTURE.”

On the floor of the giant lobby was a familiar symbol, it was a snake eating its own tail, making a circle symbol “Huh? Wasn’t that on the secret page’s loading screen? Hang on, I think I recognize that symbol, it’s supposed to mean something” Frank thinks but before he can remember he spots next the receptionist desk and his eyes go wide. At the desk was a goth girl. Her hair was blacker than Arabian night and her skin was paler than the snow except not *that* pale. Her hair covered her eyes and her lips were black like her hair. Dark tattooed stars decorated her cheeks and under her Guitar Hero III shirt was another shirt with stripes.

“She’s beautiful” Frank thought as his face blushes “I don’t see girls very often but goth girls are even more exotic! Plus, goths are into the occult and stuff which is awesome because I’m really into that stuff myself. Boy howdy, now I hope I get the job for sure now!” Frank meets up with the goth receptionist and is so smitten by, her gothic beauty, that he forgets to say anything at all.

The goth girl must have noticed Frank through her dyed bangs “Um. Can I help you?” She asked in a bored voice. “Hi, uh, how are you? Ha-ha” Frank asks, forgetting he was supposed to

ask her about his interview "*Fine*. Are you here for an interview?" Suddenly Frank remembers his interview, that he was supposed to be here, for "Oh, right! Yes, I'm here for the interview, that's right" Frank says, taking control of himself, before he can make a withdrawal in his pants.

The goth girl types into her computer which was fused to the desk and part of the same dark material "Mhmm. Head up the second floor. The supervisor will be up there" Frank smiles, "Thank you, very much, uh…" The goth girl doesn't smile but she replies "Katie. Katie Walter." Frank nods "That's a great name! I hope I can get the job, Katie, it was nice meeting you!" Katie's eyes already return to her phone and to the sounds of TikTok.

Frank skips up the grand and wide stairs twisting up to the next floor "Wowza! I really hit it off with that goth girl! My confidence is soaring like sunshine on Sunny D!" This was true, Frank felt great, and like the job was already in the bag. But then he sees the second floor corridor and his sunshine is no longer in the bag "Jeepers, this place is creepy. At least downstairs there was light from the front doors and Katie at her desk. But now I feel like I'm in some kind of spooky tomb ha-ha" he chuckled nervously in order to alleviate the tension.

Walking down the hall, Frank arrives at an intersection where two other hallways branch from his current path. Down one of the halls he sees

another human being. It is an elderly looking janitor with a beard, mopping on the floor “Excuse me” Frank says, ready to ask the janitor for directions. Before the janitor can look at Frank a presence forms behind Frank and he hears a voice, “Ah, Frank I presume?”

Frank turns around and sees nobody is actually standing behind him “W-what? I could feel someone standing behind me and I swore I just heard somebody say my name!” His heart was beginning to beat like a heart thrown into a rather competitive ping pong match “Um, down here, Frank” Frank looks down and sees a short man with curlier than curly hair, brown coat, and red bowtie “I’m the supervisor here at Wells Fargo. I’m Mr. Card” They shake hands “Sorry about that, this place was kind of giving me the skeebers and I guess you scared me ha-ha.”

“Not to worry, young man, I fully understand this place can take some getting used to. Here's hoping you do get the chance to get used to it, hmm?” Card has a chuckle but Frank is unsure what he found so funny “Is he laughing at nothing?” Frank thinks to himself “I wonder if he’s a bit crazy. Nothing wrong with being a bit crazy though, if anything, that adds character for some people”

“Wells Fargo is an excellent and rapidly growing bank. We really take care of our members as well as our employees. I do hope that-” Card stops talking when he notices a bit of water on the

ground where they are standing. Card twists his head to the side and his eyes narrow like a hawk about to do a driveby on some gerbils “Janny! What the *fuck* is this!?” Card screams at the janitor who now looks over to see him and Frank “What did I tell you before, you daft cunt! You stupid shit! I said it once I’ve said it a thousand times! Mop up *ALL* the water when you clean my floors! Not some of it. Not most of it. *ALL* of it! Are you trying to get yourself fired? Is that it, you punt-sized *fuck*!?”

Frank was alarmed at how Card’s personality had switched so dramatically and so meanly at that “Um, I know it’s not my place to say, Mr. Card, but aren’t you being a little harsh right now?” Frank says, feeling bad for the janitor. Card looks back at Frank and smiles “Oh my goodness, my dear Frank, it’s not like that at all! You simply have to have a firm grip with the jannies here. Make sure they know their place and all that typical etiquette.”

The janitor hurries over with his mop, “I’m very sorry about that, Mr. Card. I’ll get to it right away-” Card’s eyes start to bulge out of his head “What are you doing? What. Are. You. Doing!? Did I *SAY* you could talk back to me? Did I!? You piece of shit! Filth! You’re less than the filth and shit you mop up, do you understand me, janny!? Can your limited, tiny, deformed nut of a brain process all this? Because it can’t even seem to understand how to work a mop it seems, you sack

of fucking garbage" Card screamed, with his spit adding to the water on the floor. He looked back to Frank and smiled again "Shall we get on with the interview, Frank? I'm sorry but my schedule has been very busy as of late so we'll be conducting it with another applicant." Frank was surprised "Another applicant?"

Card led Frank to his office where the other applicant was waiting. Card sat at his desk and behind him Frank could see a door to another further back office. What really stunned Frank, however, was, the other applicant. Frank felt himself shrinking in his shoes as the other applicant stood to shake his hand. They were very tall and sharply dressed, tie and all! They were also quite handsome and black "I've never seen a black person before" Frank thought. He knew they existed somewhere out there, just like all the scary cryptids his favorite YouTubers talked about. Frank shook the man's hand and thought "Well, if black people exist then Tats Top videos must be right about the moth man too."

"Hello, my name is Frank" Frank says to the well dressed black man "Nice to meet you, Frank. My name is Rhyme" Frank thought that was a funny name "That's a funny name" Frank said. "I get that a lot" Rhyme says "My parents were adamant that I become a rapper when I grew up so they thought the name would help set me on that path" "How'd that work out for you?" Frank asks.

“Well, I thought becoming an accountant was more stable. Also my favorite band is Metallica ha-ha.”

“Gentlemen, I believe I should be asking the questions here” Card says and the three have a wholesome laugh before each taking their seats. “Let’s begin, shall we? We only have room for one position here so no hard feelings to the man who I have to send home today. That said, we'll start with education. Rhyme, we’ll start with you” Card says and Rhyme smiles “Of course. As my cover letter will tell you I was the valid victorian at Sacred Heart University. I graduated with a 4.0 GPA in Accounting and duel majored in Astrophysics since I guess I just like my numbers too much ha-ha” Card gives a satisfied nod, “Very good, and you, Frank?” Frank cleared his throat “Ah, well, I was homeschooled” “Home schooled?” Card asks, sounding surprised “Well, only up to middle-school ha-ha, it got pretty boring around then ha-ha” Frank says. Card’s eyes begin to flutter “I see.”

“Next question, tell me about your prior work experience” Card says and Rhyme answers “I was regional manager for Goldman Sachs at my last job but my tenure was only two years since I was covering for the holder’s position who was battling cancer, since recovered thankfully. The bulk of my career was at JPMorgan’s head office in New York City. I spent ten years there before the temporary position was made available at Goldman Sachs. I was a supervisor like you, Mr.

Card. Though maybe not as handsome ha-ha" Card and Rhyme both laugh like friends at a bar "Very good, very good, Mr. Rhyme. What about your prior work experience, Frank?" Frank shrugs "Actually, I've never had a job before" an awkward silence fills the room and Frank adds "but I do like to write sometimes" Card turns his body away from Frank "I see."

"How about one more question" Card says "what would you say is your greatest strength?" Rhyme thought quietly for a moment "That's a hard question" Rhyme says and Frank thinks "Ha, I know this one easy-peasy, looks like I got the job in the bag after all" Rhyme continues "I always hate to brag ha-ha. But if I were to highlight one strength it would be communication, specifically my relationship with bank members. I've been in this line of work for over a decade and I've learned you can't please everyone. It's not going to happen. But that doesn't mean you can't try your best to do otherwise. I've always believed, no matter where I am, that the company's success translates to my success and that begins with doing all that I can for the member's benefit" Card tried to hide the tear he was wiping away from his eye "Very nice, Mr. Rhyme. Oh, um. Frank?" Frank put on a big smug smile "Gee, that's easy. My biggest strength is how smart I am."

Card flattens his lips and Rhyme averts his attention from Frank "I see, well…" Card looks to Rhyme and smiles as he stands with an open palm

“I believe I’ve reached my decision. Mr. Rhyme” Frank’s eyes widen in horror at what he is seeing and he thinks “Is Mr. Card going to hire Rhyme over me? What kind of Affirmative Action bullshit is this?” Frank begins to panic but remembers the hiring card in his pocket “W-wait” Frank stands up and offers the card to Card “I just remembered to give this to you” Frank says. Card gives a curious look at the card and takes it from Frank “Um, I see. One moment” Card enters the further back office with the hiring card and Rhyme begins to look confused at what is happening.

In the next room Frank can see Card’s shadow and another shadow talking and then Card returns, to the room “I’m sorry, Mr. Rhyme, but we will not be seeking your services at this time” Card says while the shadow of the figure remains behind the door, watching. Rhyme was visibly stunned “Pardon me? I thought you might have preferred my experience, I don’t understand” Card’s face went red in an instant “I don’t have to take this abuse! Security!” Card slammed his fist on a button on his desk and a second and a half later two men dressed in full, black tactical gear barged in, grabbed Rhyme by the arms, and dragged him out of the office “Oh goodie” Frank thought.

Card congratulated Frank and said “Welcome to Wells Fargo, Frank” but as Card shook his hand Frank couldn’t help but feel creeped out by the figure standing at the door in the next room. Luckily the figure stepped away

from the door and Card proceeded, to help Frank fill out his W9 form. After that was done they did it again because Frank didn't fill it out correctly the first time.

"Your office will be right this way, Frank" Card said with a skip to his step "Um, Mr. Card, isn't it kind of strange I still don't know what my job here is yet?" Frank asks "Oh deary me, Frank, I must have been distracted from all the fun I've been having. You're the latest member of our finance department. You'll be responsible for filing client paperwork and inter-banking transactions. Some cash handling too for when we have to take money from our private vault and distribute it to our smaller offices. I trust no training will be necessary. You're good to start today, I imagine?" Frank felt he was forgetting something, perhaps it was the strange atmosphere getting to him, but he nodded and said "Yep! I can start right away!" He couldn't wait to tell Daddy dearest.

"Good, good, good" Card said "and here we are!" Card opened the door to an office down the hall from his. The inside of the office wasn't as grand as the rest of the Wells Fargo building. In fact, it was rather cozy. Filing cabinets, ferns, and two desk spaces at opposite ends. At one of the desks was a man typing away at his computer. He wore a suit of all plaid which Frank found eerily retro "Allow me to introduce your partner in crime. Mr. Bineville, come and meet Frank."

Bineville closed his tabs “Hello, Mr. Card. Ah! So this must be the new hire we were expecting. This is good timing, all the paperwork was beginning to overwhelm even me” Bineville said “Mr. Bineville is our office champion. Employee of the month six times in a row” Card said “Six months? How long has Wells Fargo been around for?” Frank asked and a very serious expression sizzled down Card’s face “Wells Fargo has always been here, I shall leave it at that, and Mr. Bineville I shall leave to you! He’ll show you the ropes and answer any questions you might have. Not that he’ll have to, Frank here is *brilliant* as I learned from our interview earlier, so you two should get along famously. Toodaloo!”

Card practically dashed out of the room then and Frank went to shake Bineville’s hand but was instead given a stack of papers “Our job is very simple, Mr…Frank was it? All we have to do is make sure the numbers on paper equal the same numbers on another paper. Of course there’s plenty of steps in between but since you’re clearly experienced and since Mr. Card can speak for your intelligence, I suppose you’re good to get right to it. See that these papers are filed. I’ll go make a quick phone call if you need me.”

“Nice to meet you too…” Frank muttered and looked at the paperwork in his hand with befuddlement “Oh crumbs, I’ve never filed anything in my life before. What the hell am I supposed to do with all this paperwork? I don’t

want to actually ask what I need to do after Mr. Card hyped me up like that. What if they decide to let me go already?" Frank thought desperately of what he was supposed to do "Geez, I didn't expect, to get started like this already and I can't blow this now. Where do I file this? Where, where, where?"

Frank looks at his computer, then the filing cabinets, and then he sees the boxy device beside his desk "Hm, what's that?" He goes over to inspect the device and sees a slot that looks designed for accepting papers "Bingo" Frank thinks. He puts the papers into the slot and the device hungrily eats the papers, emitting a buzzing sound as it does "Hotdog! This job is easy!"

Atlas

It was the hardest job Atlas ever had. That terrible temptation. Having to drive around five million dollars and just dreaming of skidding off an exit and heading off to Mexico. But such thoughts were foolish. Such thoughts were dangerous and Atlas had enough danger driving on three hours of sleep.

Atlas saw himself in the rear view mirror of his armored truck. He didn't like what he saw. Such sleepy eyes, even his authentic rounded hippy glasses, worn by Lenin himself (Or so e-bay said) couldn't conceal the tired in his eyes that sleep couldn't fix. Such frizzy and unwashed hair, the kind shampoo couldn't save. Such a sorry excuse for a man, he looked away from himself in shame.

As he returns his eyes to the road ahead of him he sees the immediate danger of stopped traffic. Atlas slams the brakes and barely avoids crashing into the build up on the I-90. He was lucky the roads were salted, "Fuck me," Atlas gasps, catching his breath, "just my lu…" He narrows his eyes to the space behind him. The door to the back had come open and he spotted something most peculiar attached to one of the deposit bags he was transporting. "Is that… Is that a check paperclipped to the bag?" Such a stroke of

fortune that he nearly crashed his truck in order to spot the strange check.

The truck driver inspects the checks with eyes so amazed you would think he was watching unicorns commit a hate crime. He wastes no time and calls up his girlfriend. “What is it, Atlas?” His girlfriend says as a greeting, coldly. “Ari, babe! It finally happened!” Atlas sucks on the quiet of the moment like delicious candy. “Deadass? For real??” Ari asks. “For real for real! We finally got a sucker!” Atlas laughs and Ari squeals with delight.

It had only been a theory, really. Something Ari brought up one night while they were drinking. It was possible, Ari hypothesized, to grow wings if you put enough pressure on your back and focused really hard on imagining wings sprouting from there. But she was drunk and Atlas ended up causing a scene that prohibited them from returning to the barcade after that. But that was only one of Ari’s crazy ideas. Another was that plants could go into shock if you moved them around enough. However, this had nothing to do with that. What Atlas was calling about, was Ari’s theory that one day, someone might screw up some paperwork in one of Atlas’ bank transfers, and that they would be able to take advantage of the mistake and pocket the cash.

“So? What’s the error, honey? What’d they do?” Ari asks. “It’s a check, babe,” Atlas says as traffic begins to unblock and resume like his

bowels had at that fateful barcade outing. Atlas continues driving down the highway and says, “I couldn’t believe it when I first saw it. Someone wrote a check. It was part of another deposit but, holy shit, Ari, you just gotta see it to believe it!”

Atlas drives further down the highway as the speed returns to a normal pace. He spots something unusual, almost as unusual as the jackpot folded in his pants. “Holy shit…” Atlas mutters aloud, eyeing the unusual sight on the side of the road. “What is it, honey? Is that number getting bigger?” Ari asks and Atlas is forced to look away as he drives by what he was looking at, “Nah, there was just this guy on the side of the road. He was sort of standing to the side and it looked like he was holding his phone up at me,” Atlas says, puzzled by the man. “That’s weird. Probably trying to get a signal on his phone. Maybe he was hitchhiking,” Ari suggested. “Nah, dude was dressed in a full suit and his hair…ah, well, it doesn’t matter at all. The check is legit though, babe. We finally lucked out.”

Continuing down the road reveals another odd sighting sitting to the side. Atlas sees a car on the side of the road which appeared to have swerved off. He sees a driver, holding a chain, apparently perplexed by it. A police car flashes its lights as it arrives on the scene and Atlas suddenly remembers he had better hurry and get the check home after work.

Returning to their two-room studio apartment, complete with real exposed brick walls, in the city, Atlas is greeted by Ari with a passionate kiss. “Take a look, sweety,” Atlas says, showing Ari the check he smuggled from the job. Ari, who was a beautiful woman with a beautiful brain and even more beautiful breasts, bounces her chest boobily with delight, “No way! You weren’t kidding, hun. This is the real deal. We’ve gotta cash this right away.”

“Yes,” Atlas smiles, “to think, just like that, we’re forty thousand dollars richer. That’s like $400,000 in Mexico! With our savings we’d be halfway to millionaire status,” Atlas says with a laugh. Ari joins his laugh but says, “Well, we wouldn’t be *that* rich but $400,000 in Mexico sounds like a good start to me. Hope you’ve been practicing your Mexican, hun,” Ari says. “*Si, mia amata puta.* I listen to what those kids yell at me when I drive my truck, I feel we could really make it work. We’ll go to one of the resort towns with a beautiful beach,” Atlas begins and Ari adds, “Then we’ll start our dream jobs as graphic artists, working full time on our original webtoons, without ever having to worry about bills!” “The Mexican Dream,” Atlas declares.

The two kiss again and Atlas says, “Man, I can’t wait to quit this shitty bank job. I always got the creeps from that place anyway.” Ari holds Atlas tightly for a hug, “I can’t wait to quit that shitty airport job. We can do all that tomorrow.

Before we cash out I say we celebrate with a couple of drinks first!"

The celebration begins and Atlas and Ari crack open their craft beers and down them almost instantly. Naturally the night is young and the two demolish their Be Hoppy six-pack. Drunk on booze and the thrill of their plans they crack out the last of the tequila they had since cinco de maya and toasted their drinks to Mexico. Ari chanted to the shots, "One tequila, two tequila, three tequila, *floor*!" Before they knew it it was dark out and they had had too many drinks and they knew that that was a problem.

"We'll cash out tomorrow," Ari says, softly nestling her face into Atlas' chest. Atlas looks out their lone window to stargaze in wonder, "Imagine us, Ari. Spending all our time working on our craft. Channel Frederator approved, just like we always talked about." Ari is about to slip off into a deep, comfortable sleep betwixt Atlas' chest and armpit when she says, "Hey. Can I see the check again?" Atlas shrugged, "Sure, take a look." Atlas pulls out the check and Ari giggles at the sight of it, "What kind of idiot fucks up that bad?"

Frank Three

It had been a blast for Frank, with how easy work turned out to be. Little could anyone suspect, it only took about half an hour to get bored with it. Over a hundred documents had been handed to Frank and he stuffed them all into his buzzing, automatic filing machine. Vast amounts of numbers filled those pages. Each of them meaning nothing to the increasingly bored newhire.

"Did you see my summary report for the day" Mr. Bineville had asked Frank. "It's 800 pages long so you know it has to be good!" Right away, Frank, had realized Bineville was very annoying, to be around. Twice he had bored Frank with stories about work he hadn't asked about, and spouting stupid nonsense like "teamwork makes the dream work!" Yes, Bineville had to be the worst part of it all, Frank was sure, the filing was the easy part but Bineville kept finding more of it to do.

Finding a moment to sit down couldn't come fast enough for him. Even though it was only his first day on the job, he felt he got the idea, feeling like he had worked enough. "Enough for a whole lifetime" Frank thought on his fifty minute thirty minute break. Time managed to slip by and somehow the end of the work day was at last creeping up on Frank.

“Did you already file those Beyman forms?” Bineville said, intruding yet again on Frank’s private work space “He was most excited to get his loans for his factory and needed them in today. I must say, you are quite the workaholic like myself” Frank was ready to gag from all the pestering but instead he said “Yes, they’re all filed” then he thought to himself “I hope Daddy dearest thinks one day here is enough to prove whatever point he was trying to make. Working sucks!” Bineville doesn’t shut up “I can see you’ll be a boon to the company, Frank. Why don’t you take 15. You’ve more than earned it. When you come back we can wrap things up for the day” At last he had good words to say.

Frank heads over to the break room down the hall. To his luck he sees Katie Walter over by the crab machine “Hey, Katie! Fancy seeing you here ha-ha” Frank says as he fails to make eye contact with the girl who was hiding her eyes behind her bangs “Oh, so they hired you. Fred, was it?” Katie asks. “*Frank*” Frank said, wanting her to know “But that’s okay! Looks like we’ll have plenty of time to get to know each other ha-ha. So…” A dire silence settles between the two “Uh, so, do you like music?” Frank asks “No. I don’t like music” Katie says. “Oh, um, how about movies?” Frank asks. “I don’t watch movies” Katie says. “Hm. Well, how long have you been working at Wells Fargo?” Frank asks. “A while” is

all Katie says “Do you like it here? Because to be honest I find the atmosphere a little…”

“Dearest me!” Booms the voice, of Mr. Card “Fancy seeing you here, Miss Walters” Card says and the goth girl lets out a disgusted sigh. Card blushes for a moment as he studies Katie for a quick moment “Did you hear about that big project that Melonbust is working on? Turns out his… oh, hello Frank” Card says, noticing Frank on the other side of where Katie was standing “I’m heading home” Katie declares “Wait, Miss Walters, allow me to escort you to your car. You know the stories about these parts afterall” Card says as he starts to follow Katie out to the room “I’ll take my chances, Mr. Card” Katie says as she exits the breakroom. “I’ll give you a call to make sure you’re home then!” Card looks back to Frank and after an awkward stare down he smiles “Walk with me, Mr. Frank.”

Frank thought Wells Fargo was a very strange place. Especially so when Card led Frank around the corner to the Wells Fargo art gallery on the second floor, but it was more like the second, third, and fourth floors with how tall the room was. There were several staircases, and, between the staircase, were many abstract statues standing from streams of crystal clear water. One statue looked like a muscular man with no face, holding the world on his back. Another statue appeared to be a man in the pose of a Y though, it looked to Frank, like he was failing at jump rope. Frank had never

been to a museum before, but he felt like he was in one now.

"How are you liking the job so far?" Card asks Frank "It's fine, Mr. Card. But it can get a little boring ha-ha" Frank says "I suppose that makes sense. You are a *certified genius* from what the manager was telling me." Frank's eagle ears wiggle at this "Was that the man you spoke to during the interview?" Card averts his eyes "I cannot say, I'm afraid" Card says. "Oh, well, he must have, liked my hiring card" Frank says back. Card gave a serious look to Frank then "Do not worry yourself about the manager, Frank" Card says mysterious which only makes Frank more curious. Card's serious look melts into a warm smile after that "How are things with Mr. Bineville, then? Is he up to your…" Card goes quiet and looks to his feet. Frank looks down with them and they each see a bit of water on the black, granite, floor.

Card spots the janitor from before mopping ahead and a fury ignites in his eyes, a fury like if Napoleon Bonaparte arrived at Waterloo and the British put up a "you must be this tall to do battle" sign and he wasn't tall enough "What the fuck is this!? You turd in human skin, hey, I'm talking to you!" Card storms up to the bearded janitor who quickly stands up straight when he sees Card "Have I not said it enough to get it through that thick fucking skull of yours? Is there even a brain at the end of all that skull, janny!? Mop up all the

water when you're done cleaning! I'm sorry my skull isn't as God damned thick as yours, janny, but if *I* slip on that water it'll crack my skull! Is that what you want!? Do you want me to slip on *your* mess and crack my skull open!?"

The janitor shakes his head "No, Mr. Card! I'm sorry, Mr. Card" Card sizes up the janitor and says "Mop it all up again and this time keep the floors fucking dry you mouth breathing *punt*!" Card turns back to Frank and smiles "I apologize, Mr. Frank. I've held you up, haven't I? Any issues at all, don't hesitate to find me. I shall let you back at it then" Card says before skipping back the way he came. Left alone with the janitor, Frank looks at him more closely. He wears a green janitor suit and has a gray beard with greasy, longish hair. The janitor waits for Card to walk away before holding up his middle finger toward the irate supervisor. Frank gives a surprised look, like a monkey at the zoo finding extra fries at the bottom of the bag that was thrown at its head.

"I'm Jason" the janitor says to Frank "Frank" says Frank "I'm sorry Mr. Card is such a dick to you" Jason shrugs "It's cool, man. I'm used to it" "Are you really going to have to mop up this entire room again?" Frank asks but Jason just chuckles "Nah, man. I'll just say I did" the two have a laugh together. "So you're in finance I hear? That's gotta be tough, I hear those guys work really hard" Jason says "It's very tough. Mr. Bineville doesn't ever shut up and at the same time

he doesn't run out of work to make me do" Frank explains "Yea, that Bineville is a creep. As bad as Card. You should do as I do and just take things easier. Things always have a way of working out, I find. That's how I'm able to put up with Mr. Card" Jason looks over his shoulder "Hey, you're cool, right? You want to see my office?" Frank's ears wiggle again "*You* have an office?"

It took a while to reach Jason's office as it was so far back in the Wells Fargo building. As it turned out, the office, was no more than "A boiler room?" Frank asked, for some reason feeling uneasy the moment he stepped inside "Yup. As long as I keep the boiler stable, nobody comes in here. In fact, it's less of my office and more my bedroom" Jason says "Wait, you live here?" Frank looks around. He sees a hammock over several shoeboxes, a desk with some plants Jason was growing under some kind of blue light, a stack of magazines in one corner, and a trapdoor with chains over it in the other "Home sweet home" Jason shrugs "though technically I'm homeless"

"Wow, you don't own any home? Not a single one? That's weird" Frank says, sitting in the cow printed moon chair Jason had tucked to the side "They say the only thing rising faster than the crime rate in this country is the homeless population. Economy's in terrible shape. It's no wonder people are turning to crime" Jason says "My daddy hates criminals, I don't get why people even break the law" Frank says. Jason smiles

“Heh, well, I know one crime that’s pretty fun” Jason pulls out a piece of chalk “Wait, that isn’t chalk” Frank says “Holy shit! Is that a drug!?”

“Hey, shhh, take it easy, man. That’s like, the whole point of the joint as it were. Taking it easy. So what do you say, Frank?” Jason lights up the joint, and a smell foreign to Frank, invades his nose. “That doesn’t smell like Daddy’s cigars” Franks says “Nah, it’s premium weed, my guy. Not like they would drug test you if they already hired you too. Like I was saying. You cool, Frank?” Jason offers Frank the joint. “I’m cool” Frank answers.

After Frank fills his lungs with the noxious fumes of Jason’s mad reef, he begins to giggle like a little girl “Hey, this stuff is pretty funny hee-hee!” Jason laughs, Frank laughs, it’s a good time by all! Jason talks about his family or something but Frank wasn’t listening, he felt silly like he was bubbling from the inside. Frank then asks “So what’s with the chained up trapdoor over there?”

Jason’s smile goes grim and somehow the lights seem to dim “Oh that? More boilers down there. Well, used to be, I guess. First room down there is a bunch of big, old boilers that aren’t even in use. But there’s also all these other rooms down there too. *Ruins*, really. Pipes and pillars alike. All smashed apart. Explored it once to go clean a little but I discovered this place has long since forgotten those depths. No idea what those rooms are or how

far down they go. Never brought it up with anyone else before, either. Gives me a bad feeling, like I wasn't alone when I was there. So I chained it up afterwards and I sort of get this idea that I'm living here just to keep an eye on that door, making sure nothing ever comes out."

"Homp! Hmmp. Mm" Frank yawns "I think this weed is making me tired. Is it time to go home yet?" Just as Frank was daydreaming of dreaming in his bed he hears a whiny voice from all the halls "Frank? Frank!?" Frank jumps up "Oh shit, that pain in the ass Bineville" Jason goes to grab his mop "I should get back to it too. Cool hanging with you, Frank."

Frank skidoos into the hallway where Bineville finds him "Oh there you are, Frank. Listen, I've got to attend a meeting in a minute. I need you to go to the deposit depot, it's actually just around the corner from here, just past the laundry room. The bankers have left some assets for you to verify, money we need to send out to our smaller banks. It's exactly what you've been doing all day, so should be a breeze, but you'll be handling actual cash now" Bineville says, annoyingly "Actual cash?" Frank asks "Don't worry, you've been doing so well already. Just make sure that the money you're bagging for the armored transfer matches what's on the papers. I'm *counting* on you, Frank ka-ha."

Entering the deposit depot, Frank finds the room vacantly white unlike all the futuristic black

of the rest of the Wells Fargo megastructure “It almost looks like a room for crazy people” Frank thinks “good thing I’m not crazy ha-ha” He sees on a table several bricks of cash, bags for storing them, some other supplies, and above all that, a window overlooking a garage of armored trucks ready to roll. “Wow, I’ve never seen so much cash before” Frank thinks in awe, seeing all the neatly prepared bundles of currency “Granted I’m rich myself and all but I’ve never just seen cash hanging out in its natural environment like this before. Welp, better get to it so I can go home” Frank looks over the table and the bags on it “so I just have to make sure the cash I bag matches what the papers say? Gee, that sounds easy” Frank thinks as a very nice feel-good feeling warms his body. His mind feels as fuzzy as a bear who just woke up at 5am and saw he was in fact early in getting up and could go back to sleep. Frank gets to work.

Frank comes up to the last bag, a different number than the first three which were all a hundred grand each “$100,040 dollars” Frank says in a sing songy voice “that’s funny, this one is $40 more than the others” Frank seals the last bag shut and goes over the paperwork with a big smile on his face “A grand total of $440,040. That’s a lot of 4’s ha-ha” Frank blinks his eyes against the light as he notices two bricks of twenties, adding up to “another $40,000? Huh? How did I miss those?” Frank looks over his paperwork “Oh butter and

crumbs! I only bagged $400,040, not $440,040. Ah, all these damn 4's got me confused. I better make an edit" Frank changes the total amount to $400,040 but as he looks over the individual bags he only gets more confused and disoriented "Darn, I can't think straight at all but I feel so funny ha-ha. What was I doing? Uhh, oh yeah! I had to figure out a way to put $40,000 into one of the bags. But they're all sealed already, so what do I do?"

An idea came to Frank. It was an idea so good, Frank thought, one might say it was an idea of complete genius "I've got an idea so good one might say it was an idea of complete genius!" Frank takes a check from the supplies and fills it out for "Forty Thousand Dollars 00/100 - $40,000" He dated it and signed his name followed by "ツ" Lastly, he made the check out to "Cash."

Feeling very good, Frank clips the check and paperwork to the deposit bag and drops it down the chute to the garage. When he hears, the thump, Frank stands at ten and two like he was experiencing a Vietnam flashback. His mind goes into overdrive and breaks out of its fuzzy state "Wait, something isn't adding up here. I already changed the paperwork number… so why did I just write that check?" He realized in making two corrections he had, in fact, created a $40,000 oopsy.

Frank's eyes widen in super fear as the truck in the garage drives off with the extra "$40,000!?"

He bites his nails. To an aspiring indie author on the internet, $40,000 was an unfathomable sum of money. This told Frank the trouble he was in “Oh cheese and crackers! Who do I tell to fix this mess!?” Frank scurried out into the halls until he sees Card walking by “Mr. Card! Can I ask you a quick question!? If I, hycondarically speaking, were to have caught a variance in some numbers, what would happen?” Frank notices then Card seems rather pale like he had seen a ghost. Card shakes his head, bobbing all his cottony candy like hair until he comes to “A-a variance? Well, we’d take extreme prejudice against who had ever caused it” Card says “Oh” Frank ohs “But! If there were a variance, uh, *hycon-daric-ally,* speaking” Card points his finger directly at Frank’s face “I would have you *go* solve it! You are the genius after all.”

“Me?” Frank asks but Card is already walking off “I have to make a very important phone call now, Frank. If you see the janny tell him to get his ass back to work” Frank’s eyes go big “The janny?” Frank finds Jason back in his boiler-office-home, snipping the leaves off a bonsai tree “Jason! This is all your fault!” Jason jumps up “W-what I do?” “The weed!” Frank cries “If I didn’t smoke that weed you gave me I wouldn’t have made a $40,000 error on my first day! Now if I don’t fix it they’re going to fire and my Daddy is going to be mad at me!” Jason gives Frank a confused look “What?”

Frank explains the situation and Jason nods knowingly, like a wise wizard, before smoking some more pot “Damn, you made it out to cash? That’s bad, anyone could cash that. You should probably be honest with your mistake” Jason says “I’m not going to look like some idiot, Jason. You better help or I'll be busting you for all this weed!” Jason gives a surprised look, joint hanging in his mouth. He sighs “Alright, I know a few things about this place. We’ll gather your paperwork, call the other banks, and make sure, they got all the money you sent out. If that happens it’s just a matter of changing paperwork.”

It only made Frank more angry that he had to wait an extra hour when he could have gone home and watched his cartoons already. Once the extra hour went by, Frank uses Jason’s boiler phone, and calls up the smaller banks “Wells Fargo, Chinatown, Lee Shun-Ah speaking” the person on the other end says “Konichiwa ha-ha” Franks says “this is, uh” Frank thinks of a fake name “Hank” he sees Jason is giving him a panicked look and waving his hands “er, *Hanklin*, from the main office. I was just calling to confirm if all assets have arrived today” Frank says “Hm. Yes, we just got the shipment of, let’s see, $100,040. Thought we asked for more twenties this time, that’s odd” Lee Shun-Ah says and Frank feels his heart ready to bust like a teenager on prom night “Oh, well, that’s all correct, thanks for answering, bye!”

Slamming the phone down, Frank cries out "They didn't get the check!" Frank sees Jason picking through some paperwork "Thought this might have happened" Jason says "What are you talking about, Jason? What's happened?" Frank asks "One of the truck drivers saw the check and saw opportunity calling. Can't really blame them but too bad for them we're already on top of this. Your paperwork should tell us who the truck driver was today so all we would have to do is go pay them a visit before they pay themselves. Ah, here we go" Jason holds up a paper "Today's driver was… Atlas Andersen."

"Thank God, we know his name then. So that's the crook who pocketed the check? You're sure?" Frank asks "Oh yea, baby. Wells Fargo can't stop him from cashing out that check with the way you wrote it but they'll definitely hang you, I mean, us, if we don't get the money back at this point. I don't know about you, Frank, but I'm not ready to get into a scrape with a man who probably thinks he won the lottery. I do know some, let's say, less savory people you might want to consider hiring to get it back" Jason says, blowing smoke from his joint.

"You mean I should hire some bad guys to get it?" Frank asks, thinking deeply on the matter "I want to avoid looking dumb and all but that feels like it could be a problem" Frank says and Jason shrugs "You're going to have to break into Atlas' house or hunt him down when he skips

town. Paying ten percent out of pocket might be worth it, Frank. Especially worth it given who Wells Fargo will send after you if Atlas slips through their fingers. They'll want their money back one way or the other, but they'll also make you regret slipping up like this. Hurts the company image and they can't have that. I'm telling you, Frank. Wells Fargo can employ some bad, bad, people" Frank gives a nervous look to Jason "Who could they possibly send?"

Mike One

Observe the man. He is light of skin and flesh. His hair has grown long and is blonde like gold. He wears a suit. Black. Stark to the wool, winter coats around him. He awakes at dawn at the motel. Does the deed. Takes residence in another by noon. He awaits the next job. Polishes his shoes. Removes the salt and cake. The sun hangs over noon. His phone rings and he answers the call of Wells Fargo.

The father tended little to the man when he was young. The mother's hand hit gently unlike the father. He preferred the ma to the pa. It was her who named him Mike. It was the father he took after. The boy was smart, got an education, knew it wasn't worth much. Started working with his hands. He was good at that. Forty grand on the road says the job. The man takes a chain by the hands and tosses it onto the I-90. Cars spin and eat the snow. Now the man is waiting.

He walks off the side of the road. The truck will come this way. He sees it and takes up his phone. Snaps a picture of the driver. The face belongs to the photo. The man belongs to him. Heads back down the road. Patrolman pulls up, responding to the car gone stray. The cop waves him down. Smelled the suspicion like the midday heat on snow.

I need you to come with me, the cop had said. Mancuso said the badge. Mike says nothing. Takes a ride to the precinct off the highway. Waits quietly on the bench.

Pick up damn it, the cop whines, hooked to his phone. His head picks up. Oh is this Wooly? It's officer Mancuso. I'm at the post off the highway, he says. Mike rises from the bench. The cop doesn't see. Don't worry, Wooly, he says. I'm not afraid of a man in cuffs. Mike reaches the cop. A minute later the cuffs are off.

The sun is bronze behind the smokestacks on the horizon. The man drives a police cruiser down the back road. Warm snow tucked on all sides. A car is ahead. The cruiser's lights flash and the two cars park still off the gray slush. The man steps out. A hermit sits in the car, rolls his windows down. Beard is filthy. Skin has begun to sag at the tug of age.

Hello, officer, says the hermit.

I need you to step out of the car, Mike says.

Is there a problem?

Step out of the car, please.

Out of the car, the hermit suddenly realizes he's never felt so cold. It's too late for him. Mike has the device in his hand.

What's that?

Mike holds it up to the hermit's wrinkled forehead, I need you to hold still, sir.

The hermit’s eyes flinch. They know before him something is coming. The device clicks and faster than any eye can see the clip is slung.

Motherfucker, the hermit wails, holding his face, crouched over the snow. He is blinded by pain as Mike checks the blind spots from within his car. Mike drives off with the hermit's car, leaving the old man writhing, yelling, God damn, that motherfuker.

The device sits in the passenger seat. A common office staple gun, harmless to the unassuming eye. Reimagined for a gothic violence. It was sunset when Mike pulled into the lot of the gas station, bland as it was, numerous like the stars forming above. The last of the sun’s light winked behind the distant city and twilight reigned over the sky, separating man from the heavens. There Mike sat idle in the car, beside the gas pump, a suit among men.

The radio reverberated sweet dreams off the radio as Mike lit a cigarette, tending to the nozzle of the gas pump. He shifted his eyes around cautiously, assuming forty grand by now could be anywhere. It was frustrating to Mike, what mistakes could do, and what they could make him have to do. His anger was righteous, he knew. For the harm he would do this night was not his responsibility. Yet wherever the money hid itself, Mike would find it. He had with him a car and could go anywhere.

Mike would never stop, but he would go inside the convenient store behind the gas station, if only to pause the hunt for some fritos and baja blast. Staple gun tucked inside the pocket of his suit coat, he collected the items and made his way to the counter where the wagie awaited him. The wagie was a sad creature to look upon. Pale skin and empty, neutral expression, not unlike the face found on the dead. Lazy eyed and capped by company logo, the hat was their brand, worthy of a burn marked onto the flesh of a slave, Mike realized.

Will that be all for the day, sir, the wagie asks, ringing up Mike's items.

Mike sees on the counter a box of chocolates, packaged in the form of a red heart. He places it on the counter. These, plus the chocolates, he says. His mind considers his date tonight. It was only right to bring chocolates on a date.

That'll be fourteen eighty-eight, sir.

A twenty drops on the counter. The bag of fritos opens. Do you always address patrons with sir?

I'm just being polite, sir.

I didn't tell you to be polite, Mike says. He begins to eat the fritos, eyes on the heart of chocolates, then the soul, diminished as it was, in the wagie's dark eyes.

The wagie's face twists in a nervous fashion. Chocolates for a lady? The wagie asks. Mike can

tell the wretched husk wants to say the magic word of servitude again.

That is none of your business, is it?

Sorry, I guess not.

Why are you selling Valentine's chocolate? It's November.

It's just the company likes to sell this stuff early, I guess.

You guess? So you don't know?

I, uh, I guess I don't.

You guess that you don't know? Are you slow?

What?

Mike dropped the bag of fritos on the counter, allowing it to uncurl. He reaches into his coat, feels the smooth surface of the staple gun, presses his hand deeper. What's the most you ever lost on a game of yahtzee, Mike asks.

I-I don't even know how to play-

Mike removes a cup with five dice. He shakes the cup and leaves the dice on the counter. Pick which dice to keep, Mike says.

W-what? Why? How do I play?

You've been playing your entire life. Choose which dice.

Uh, the even ones, I guess? The wagie was still guessing and Mike was beginning to show his teeth as his eyelid did its twitch. The dice rolls and the wagie, as he was in life, was without a clue. He calls the dice again and again, no idea what is going on. No idea the game he is playing.

Yahtzee, Mike finally says. He smiles at the wagie. Well done. Here, he says, sliding his baja blast over to the wagie who had accidentally won the only game that mattered. To your health, Mike says, have a blast.

The wagie bows his head shamefully as Mike disappears into the night, off for his date with chocolates in hand. The baja blast had never tasted so good.

Woolston Two

Few things could hold back the iron hammer of justice. One such thing, however, was tummy aches. After downing a pack of macarons while showing his new partner around the precinct, Woolston succumbed to the tummy ache of all tummy aches. “We’ll start the investigation tomorrow, *hoong*,” he had groaned. Tomorrow had arrived and Woolston tried to remember the stomach pains as a symptom of the six-pack he drained after politely telling Krake to go home for the evening.

Krake. Even thinking his name filled Woolston with a rage. He had hoped he had only imagined meeting Inspector Krake in Chief Hayes’ office. Another wild idea from the booze he was pounding back that evening. Alas, no cigar. Though his head hurt like a cigar was burning into his brain. He knew the bastard Krake was real. “If it’s one thing I don’t want, it's a damn partner holding me back, cramping my stylized… style,” Woolston found himself muttering as he pulled up to the precinct. With a sigh, he saw the dark suit, ponytail wearing yuppy waiting in the front, “here we go.”

“Good morning, detective,” Inspector Krake said as Woolston strolled up the curb. “How is your stomach today?” Woolston thought the bastard was already getting up on his case, “Better

than your ass will be with my foot up it if you bring that up again. Get in the car. We're in a rush." Krake nodded, "Good, I take it we're starting bright and early to make up for waiting a day." Woolston gave Krake a funny look, "What? No, the Denny's breakfast special is only valid until the hour. We gotta get a move on if we're gonna get our grand slams on."

Groaning behind the wheel of the car, wiping the crumbs off his face, Woolston made a tough call he knew only he had the guts to make, "We'll start the investigation tomorrow, *hoomng*." Krake narrowed his eyes like an oriental spotting a ghost stealing from a church, "I'm sorry, detective, but no. The bank will be open at this hour. We start the investigation into the grand larceny case. *Now*." Woolston grit his teeth due to his anger at Krake telling him what to do, and also the gas, "Kiss my ass, Krake. I need a minute here, that's all. Besides, we didn't jump into this last night. Another hour won't kill us," Woolston said. "Detective, I didn't argue with you last night because the bank was already closed when we met. You told me to choke a dick and to never speak to you again. The day was already over. Now the bank is open and it is time to do our jobs," Krake said. "You didn't take my advice very well," Woolston said. "I sense you don't get on well with partners. Or other people for that matter. Nevertheless, we're in this together," Krake said. "Fuck me," Woolston groaned.

“I was hoping to stay out of this part of town for a while,” Woolston remarked, as he pulled the car under the Asian gates featuring the neon sign of “Chinatown!”[2] “Bad memories here, detective?” Krake asked. Woolston shrugged, “Eh, I drove my car through a sushi bar here last week.” Krake nodded, “I had heard about that. I don’t expect we’ll have to involve ourselves with any chases here. If one does come up then I should inform you I have titanium soles embedded in my feet along with an internal respirator in my lungs that allows me to sprint without losing stamina. Rudimentary augments from the Academy reserved for its elite graduates, ” Krake said. Woolston turned to him, “Shut up.”

The streets of Chinatown were misty and cramped. Numerous noodle stands competed with one another like they were in some kind of multi-century dynastic conflict for total noodle supremacy, as they each attempted to secure the Kuri Throne. Above these stands were various cartoony posters for the hit card game Bakajin. Above those, and in the sky, was a blimp shuffling between ads for work in the Cola Mines and Project PP. There were also girls in skimpy schoolgirl outfits. Not women. Girls! An old Chinese man with a beard down to his ankles tried to sell Woolston and Krake a cursed grasshopper the moment they stepped out of the car. They

[2] The word I was looking for is torri. A Japanese gate commonly found before shrines and in a lot of anime.

refused and he revved up the engine of his grasshopper and drove it into one of the many Chinatown alleys, flicking them off all the way.[3]

"This town is so stupid," Woolston grumbled, "and don't even get me started on the sushi and sake. The fish is cold and the booze is hot. Backwards people." Krake fixed his tie, "Enough belly-aching, detective. Up ahead is the Wells Fargo Chinatown Bank." It was true. The bank had an Asian theater look about it with cherry blossoms leading up to it down the road. "I'm just happy *they* made the call," Woolston said, "if it was the Wells Fargo central office we'd be in trouble. Nothing but loonies and willies there." There was also that business where women would go missing near the Wells Fargo central office but the bank would never permit police to investigate for long near the property. It wasn't lost on Woolston that as soon as some money became misplaced, the bank had come begging for their help. His mind went to Sheila and the little one then and he remembered he had a job to do.

Revitalized, like a teacher splashing water on their face after dropping an N bomb in class, Woolston barged into the bank, unwilling to take any shit from anyone. "I need to make a deposit," Woolston said to the teller who bore a striking similarity to Jackie Chan, "and that deposit is some questions! Take it from the account ending in the

[3] I swear to God somebody called motorcycles grasshoppers before.

Police!" Teller-chan was panicking by the way Woolston had arrived and began to throw his weight around. Being an ESL (which is totally okay mind you) he thought he might have been getting robbed, "I'm sorry, sir! I cannot find such an account!" Krake intervened, "Actually, we would like to speak with the manager."

Behind the first room was a lovely hallway with black granite walls, red carpets, and jade dragon statues. This hall led to the office of the manager where Woolston and Krake found an obese Asian woman wearing the nametag "Lee Shun-Ah." Woolston shifted his eyes to Krake and whispered, "Would you look at the size of that one." Krake turned to Woolston, "*What*?" Lee Shun-Ah smiled at the two, "Detectives! Welcome. Please, have a seat. I'm glad you're here." The two took to the silk seats and the fat manager offered the two some tea.

"Let's get straight to the nit and gritty," Woolston said, pulling out his notebook featuring the printed words "Hoc nihil significat." "You were the one who made the police report, is that correct?" Woolston asked, sitting like a thinking man. "That is correct, officer. I made it last night after I noticed something unusual with our deposit from headquarters." Woolston cringed, "Headquarters, eh? So what was unusual?" Woolston asked. "Well, sir, this is Chinatown. You can't really expect much from vendors when waving around hundred dollar bills. We've been

asking to get more twenties shipped here for when clients take out money. We even made that a specific request for yesterday. Then when the money came, well, take a look."

Lee Shun-Ah reached into her drawer and put a deposit slip on her desk. Woolston inspected it, "It was originally made out for $140,040 until someone scratched that out and dropped forty grand. This is the forty grand in question then?" Woolston asks. "Yes, officer. I thought it was strange that it was scratched out like that. They clearly meant to give us the money we asked for but then something must have happened. I only noticed all this after getting a phone call from headquarters which was even stranger. There was a gentleman by the name of Hanklin asking about the money we received. He hung up very quickly when I verified we did receive it but something wasn't sitting right with me," the manager explained. "Your diet maybe," Woolston mumbled before Krake elbowed him. "You were saying, ma'am?"

Lee Shun-Ah continues, "After all that, I called headquarters myself. The man on the phone was one of their top financiers but when I asked for records of the day he insisted they didn't exist," she said. "What do you mean the records didn't exist? What records?" Woolston asked. "The records of who sent the money over, what time, who authorized. The man I was speaking with assured me if the records did exist they would have

been filed. It's almost as if…" the fat woman trails off and the robust Woolston grumbles, "As if someone shredded the records." Lee Shun-Ah nods, "That's what I was thinking. I'll be straight with you detective, I've worked for this bank for several years but even headquarters still gives me this uneasy feeling I can't quite put into words. Something about that place isn't right and my banker instinct is screaming at me, something terribly wrong has happened with our deposit. I believe somebody may have stolen forty grand. That's why I called last night."

"Didn't you report this concern to headquarters first, ma'am?" Krake asks. Lee Shun-Ah frowns her fat face, "I did. The supervisor there assured me the situation was under control though he wouldn't let me speak to the manager. I felt by that point I had a duty to bring in the police since it was clear to me I wasn't going to understand what's really going on."[4] Woolston closes his notepad and groans, "You got a name for that supervisor?"

Lee Shun-Ah provided Woolston with two names. The supervisor Card and the driver Andersen. "We'll have to start with Card," Woolston says as he and Krake exit the office. "You make it sound like the driver would be in on this," Krake says. "Trust me, in this line of work you have to peel and pry everything, like cheese

[4] A woman moment.

off a sweaty box of pizza," Woolston says. "*What*?" Krake asks but Woolston is already on the move, "Come on. Got myself hungry."

They cut through the cluttered road dubbed the Ho Chi Minh Trail before arriving in Mao Zedong Alley. There they found a building featuring a giant replica of a donut on top of it. "Krake, let me be the first to introduce you to the finest donut shop on this side of China. Waldonuts!" Woolston said, hand out toward the building like he was ready to propose. "A donut shop in Chinatown? That doesn't seem very in theme," Krake observed. "Krake, okay, don't be such a cultural blockhead. The Chinese can appreciate a God damned donut. Even those dirty Japs celebrate KFC on Christmas, thank Jesus."[5]

The inside of the donut shop seemed like a slummy pizza joint with its pizza iconography replaced with bastardized donut art, ala the Hagia Sophia, but with donuts. An exceptionally well dressed Chinese man came to greet the two. His outfit entailed a gray wool jacket, down to just above the knees. His turtleneck sweater was likewise wool, however white. His shoes were dark, genuine puppy leather. Clung to his neck was his diamond patterned, quilt scarf. His pants were a lighter gray variant of his jacket, plaid like pajama

[5] A marketing campaign in the 1970s pushed for KFC as a substitute for turkey on Christmas in Japan. The manager Takeshi Okawara came up with the idea citing it came to him in a dream. Thus it is highly likely Jesus Christ might have had a playful hand in the custom.

yet tailored. His glasses were boxy and thick of rim. This description subsequently summarized his personality as well. He was very well dressed.

The well dressed man crossed the room in a straight line, “Oh it’s you,” he said to Woolston. “Sure is. Good to see you, Waldun.” Waldun’s eyes were bloodshot and dark by the bags, but they beamed when he saw Krake, “My my! You’re a sharply dressed fellow. Is that coat Labuschagne?” Waldun asked with a smile. “Ah, it is,” Krake said. “So you know it has to be good.” The two said in unison before Woolston cleared his throat and killed Waldun’s smile. “Waldun, my man. How ‘bout them donuts? You *are* running a donut shop here, aren’t you?” Woolston said. Waldun let out a sigh only a mother of four could appreciate, “Unfortunately.”

Waldun went behind the counter to prepare the “Woolston Dozen” as it had become known as. “Fourteen rice donuts, ready to go,” Waldun moaned like a teenager having to get up for school on school shooter day. “You sound very down in the dumps,” Krake observed. “Food service is the death of dreams,” Waldun said. “This is actually uncharacteristically upbeat for him,” Woolston chuckled, “what’s got you in such a good mood, Waldun? Got a date or something?” “As a matter of fact,” Waldun said, “I do. A nice date with a girl. A real one this time. Before that I have practice with my quartet so I’m quite busy today.” “We’ll leave you to it then,” Woolston said,

handing his credit card to Waldun. The card didn't work immediately on the reader so Woolston joked, "I guess that means it's free!" Waldun sighed.

Flakes were beginning to dance in the air as the two lawmen stepped out of Waldonuts. Just as Woolston enjoyed the first bite of his jelly rice donut, a stout Asian woman wearing a tracksuit began slapping him with her purse, "You rotten, he-devil! You drove your car through our sushi bar and the police aren't paying for any repairs! Pay up, you nasty man!" Woolston did his best to protect the donuts as the mad woman slapped away at him, "Oh my God! An Asian woman giving me heartache for *my* driving? Come on, *partner*, give me a hand here!" Woolston yelled at Krake. "Detective, have you at least apologized for the incident?" Krake asked. Woolston popped another donut into his mouth, "Forget it, Krake. It's Chinatown."

After all the trouble in Chinatown, the two drove next to the ominous Wells Fargo headquarters. A behemoth[6] temple just outside the city. Woolston felt a chill just from looking at the oddly designed building, "Let's find this Card character and get out of here quick like. Place is already giving me an upset stomach," Woolston said. He stepped out of the car and noticed something strange in the snow covered parking lot.

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[6] Something enormous, especially a big and powerful organization.

There were only a few cars scattered throughout the lot but one of the parking spaces had snow melted in a single spot. Krake must have noticed he was looking at it, “See something, detective?” Woolston wasn’t sure why his eye caught the hot spot, “Nah, let’s keep moving.”

Woolston was surprised at how dramatically large the first room of Wells Fargo was, like it was trying to impress the emperor of Star Wars, he had thought. A goth girl was waiting for them at the front desk. As Woolston approached the girl he swore he saw something move out of the corner of his eye. He glared at one of the pillars when Krake asked, “Something the matter, detective?” “No, damn place is just getting to me.” He regathered his iron nerve and approached the goth girl, “Hey there, little lady. I’m detective Woolston and this is Krake.” “*Inspector* Krake,” Krake added. Woolston turned sharply to Krake, “I was getting to that.” “How were you getting to that? You already gave my name,” Krake retorted. “Listen here,” Woolston said, before spilling his box of donuts he still had onto the goth girl’s desk.

“You got rice on my paperwork,” the goth girl said. “Here, allow me to clean that off,” Krake said, reaching over to pick up the folder with the rice on it. He began to wipe the rice off the folder without opening it. Woolston, however, swore he saw Krake’s eye turn red with rage while doing it. “Anyways, we’re looking for a Mr. Card. Would

he be available?" Woolston asked. The goth girl pointed to the stairs.

"You toad face, lizard brain mongrel," Mr. Card was shouting at the janitor upstairs, "it's one thing to not mop the floors right but to fuck up even window panes? I mean, really!? You can't even wipe glass correctly? You're worse than useless! Can you at least wipe your ass!?" Card turned and saw the two detectives and the janitor slipped away, "Hello! Can I help you gentlemen?" His smile didn't last lost when faced with the badges of Detective Woolston and Inspector Krake.

In his office he explained, "This matter should have never gone to the police. We're handling it in-house, you see. You may as well close the case now because you'll find that Wells Fargo has asked for no formal help on the matter." Woolston rubbed at his lower chin thoughtfully, "Hm. That is totally fine with me. Krake, let's crack open some cold ones." Krake was apparently not thirsty, "I'm sorry, but no. The police have an interest in this case and we will continue to investigate the matter." Card's eye twitched, "Ah, perhaps you didn't hear. Wells Fargo is declining police assistance. We're not asking you to investigate." Woolston shifted his weight in his chair, "Yea, what's the big idea here, Krake? He said he doesn't want our help so what's the fuss?"

"The mayor's administration has put special focus on crime resolution. The mayor wants any

and all crimes taken care of by the police, including this case," Krake explained. Card tapped his fingers on his desk and smiled, "The mayor's puppetmaster, you mean. I'm not sure what business it is of his that you medal in our affairs. I'm afraid you'll get no help in your investigation from me." Krake eyed the silhouette that appeared in the window of the door behind Card, "Would that be the manager?" Card forced another smile, "The manager is unwell at this time and all official Wells Fargo decisions are made by me… and my decision is that it's time for you to leave. Why don't you go investigate that missing person case that popped up in town last night. I had all these whiny girls out front asking if I had seen their friend, that seems more important to police time if you ask me. I meanwhile have to prepare for my quartet practice now," Card said and Woolston and Krake gave each other a funny look.

They were walking back to their car when Woolston asked, "Alright, fill me in on what's going on, Krake. Explain the joke to me. Card says Wells Fargo doesn't even want a case so why are you pushing for one? You're weren't one of those kids who asked for homework were you?" Woolston chuckles. Krake stops in his tracks. He looked at Wells Fargo curiously and then at Woolston, "Card's eagerness to prevent a police investigation only raises my suspicion of him. I thought you might feel the same way. Besides, it's like I said. The mayor and his friends want the

police to be more involved. To demonstrate our abilities. That's why I was selected to assist with the case."

It all started to come together for Woolston. Like delicious, steamy pasta noodles, gently swirling in a bowl of boiling water. "I see what's going on. The academy, the mayor, Hayes. They put you here to keep an eye on me. I thought it was weird your title was *inspector*. So you're here to inspect me, huh? What do you think of me so far?" Woolston asked. "I haven't decided yet," Krake said. "Yea, well, Chief Hayes must have if he stuck you with me." "He seems to think you're a good detective. Just needs someone else to work off of. We can talk more about my role in this later but what you need to understand is that your job depends on this case, detective."

Woolston let out a mighty groan, "I can't win with you, can I? Fine, I guess we're in this together after all. Like a nine year old kid and his brain tumor. There's just one problem, Krake. We've got no idea on where to find our other lead." Krake smiled, "On the contrary, detective. I know exactly where we can start with Andersen. When I was cleaning off that folder for the receptionist I used my cybernetic eye to see through the folder and read the contents. The folder just so happened to list employee addresses for payroll." "Wait, you're like an actual cyborg!? I thought you were just being a faggot before. Wow, I'm actually impressed. So you got robot feet,

lungs, and eyes. What else?" Wooloston asked, eager to know. "I only have those three things," Krake said. "That's lame. You're a lame guy, Krake." Krake fixed his tie, "Be that as it may, we have an investigation to get back to. We get to Andersen and we'll likely get to the heart of all this since he oversaw the actual deposits. I believe this case is more or less already in the bag, detective. So long as there weren't other wrenches thrown into the mix."

Frank Four

Outside it was starting, to snow, lightly. Guys in leather jackets stood in the parking lot, smoking, under the dark sky. Driving here gave Frank's tummy butterflies, having never been this deep on the wrong side, of town. Even Hairy the butler, who had driven Frank out, seemed a little nervous. Nevertheless, Hairy says "I am most proud of you, Young Master, coming to a bar to drink with your co-workers on your very first day."

"Shut up" Frank says, head down to his knees "eh, sorry, Hairy, just a little wound up ha-ha." Queer was the looks of the dive bar before Frank. Under the neon pig picture were the words "The Pig Pen." Eating inside was possible according to the menu, from what Frank had read, but it was clear to the young man, most ruffians were just here for the drinks. All that was on the menu was BBQ ribs and peanuts, anyways. "Let's get this over with" Frank sighs "Hairy, same as before, you are to wait in the parking lot while I meet with my, uh, co-workers." Sad eyes blinked from the butler to Frank "but Young Master, if this is going to take a while I should…" he quieted and Frank got out of the car.

Loud music hurt Frank's ears the moment, he stepped inside the bar. Tables were filled with what looked to Frank like bad guys from the various media, he had consumed "This place looks

like trouble" Frank thinks "I hope those guys Jason vouched for aren't too scary. Then again, they might have to be a little scary for what I need them to do" What Frank needed them to do was legally questionable at best. The idea of breaking the law worried Frank, as well as excited him.

An out of shape hag with tattoos covering her arms glowered at Frank from behind the bar, he swallowed the lump in his throat. At the end of a bar was an older man who looked like the guy from Pawn Stars. He was playing on his DS, never minding all the biker babes vying for his attention "Man, there's some tough looking characters in here" Frank thought. He then spots a confederate flag on the wall "Oh man, these guys are affiliated with Nazis too!? Where are the two guys I'm looking for? Jason said they'd be in the back by the corner but where… oh!"

The bar was a little less rowdy where the two were sitting, Frank could see. Frank had told Hairy not to mention he was going to this seedy bar as he was "waiting to tell Daddy all about the first week" when it was over. Or so he had said. But seeing the two scoundrels now, Frank realizes not even Hairy would believe them employees of Wells Fargo.

The larger one wasn't exactly fat, Frank sees. But he was big. The biggest guy in the room. He wore a white sweater that appears to have blood stains on them, giving him a sort of a butcher look. He also wears black overalls over the

sweater and has a shaved head and a face only a mother could love after some drinks. The other guy was smaller, maybe even the skinniest guy in the room. He had buggy eyes and a thin mustache and wore a green jacket that was very fuzzy around the collar. Frank approaches the two dangerous looking men and introduces himself.

"Uh, hi. Are you the guys?" Frank asks. The crook in green speaks first "You're late" he says. "What? No, Jason said you would be here at 9:00 ha-ha." The crook doesn't seem amused "What's so fuckin' funny, banker boy? Jason told us 8:00. You come in an hour late and think that's funny?" Frank could see they were getting off on the wrong foot "What? No. Jason totally said 9:00" The crook checks his phone and squints his eyes for a second "Nope. 8:00" "Oh snickerdoodles" Frank mumbles to himself "Sit down" the bigger crook commands suddenly. Frank sits.

The big one was snacking on peanuts while the skinny one was giving a nasty, and unsure, look, to Frank "Aren't you gonna say who you are?" Frank feels his palms go squiddy "Oh! Right, um. I'm Hanklin." "Are you a cop, Hanklin?" "No?" Frank was feeling very intimidated. He had always had Hairy order his pizza over the phone for him. He doubted he could have Hairy hire thugs in order to steal back forty grand. He wishes he could have though. After a moment the skinny crook relaxes back into his seat "Alright then. Glad

that's settled. I'm Z and this is Og" he says, pointing his thumb to the big crook "Sup."

"It's nice to meet you two" Frank gives a dopey smile and tries to shake Z's hand "What the fuck do you think you're doing, Hanklin?" "Um, shaking hands?" Frank asks, unsure himself "I don't want to shake your hand, Hank. Put that shit away, I don't know where you've put that hand." "R-right" Frank retracts his hand. To Z's credit, Frank had been itching himself thoroughly on the ride to the bar. Must have been his nerves getting the better of him "So what's the score, Hank? It better be good. My partner and I have been sitting around on our asses for an hour here, drinking Chud Lite" "Chud Lite?" Frank asks, having never heard of the brand. Frank looks to the table and sees the cans of beer surrounding Z and Og. The cans feature a rather ugly man with a white face, glasses, thick brows, and black hair. Ugly as he was, he was very happy, smiling proudly on the can of cheap beer he was a part of "Beer guys must know their audience" Frank thinks.

"Job. What is job?" Og asks drunkenly with a mouthful of peanuts "The job, right. As Jason would have told you, I work at the Wells Fargo bank. I'm pretty important as you can tell ha-ha" Frank says "You're pretty annoying but go on" Z says. Frank awkwardly, clears his throat, "Um, well, some mistakes were made today. No fault of my own, mind you, but somebody got away with forty grand in the form of a check" Frank explains

and Og whistles “Dats a lot of money” he says with a deep, drunk, voice “It is. You’ll get ten percent like Jason said you would. Four hundred dollars each” Frank says. Z squints his buggy eyes “What? That’s not ten percent. Ten percent would be $4,000” Frank’s eyes widen when the math reveals itself in his head “*Shit*.” As the 8th most successful indie author in the world, Frank only had $438 in his bank account.

Z takes a manly man’s gulp of his Chud Lite “Alright, so you want us to go after a check written out for forty grand? We know it's not been cashed in either, right? Okay, I think we got this handled” Z says. “Really?” Frank asks with beamed up puppy dogs eyes. Z smiles a smug smile that even the smuggiest man in the world would say it was smug “Yea, but my partner, and I, will be taking ten percent, each.” The light inside of Frank dies like an art student stepping into the real world for the first time, and then getting hit by a car, driven by their own dog no less “W-what? But that’s…” he ran the math in his head. Then he leaned to his right to work the calculator on his phone without arousing suspicion that he had to use the calculator on his phone in front of another human being “Wait, that’s $8,000!” Z checks his finger nails for dirt “It’s a lot of risk, our line of work” “Very dangerous” Og adds “Who's to say that check is even still out there. We’d want to be well compensated for work that might not get us paid” Z says “Sooner you hire, sooner we get check” Og

says “Four thousand each, you’ll know we’re paid well enough to honor the deal and actually give you the check back” Z says “Man of our h’word” Og says.

“Okay, okay” Frank snaps “I’ll pay” The problem, was, however, how? “It’s not like Daddy disowned me or anything. I might not be making tons of money with this job but he’d still probably give me eight grand if I asked nicely. Also, I just realized I don’t know how much I am getting paid at work ha-ha” Frank thinks to himself “At any rate, paying these two thugs to get the check will be well worth it once I smooth everything over at work. Above all, I have to look good!”

“You’re a smart guy picking us, Hanklin” Z says “Og and I have done this kind of work before. If you know where this check is, or should be, we’ll use our power of *persuasion* to get back for you. Course, you’ll only get your check, when we’re paid” Z says “Of course” Frank smiles and he thinks “I’m a cunning fellow, I’m sure I can cut these guys out of the equation too if I think about it ha-ha” Z frowns “What’s with that big dumb fuckin’ smile on your face? You think this is some kind of joke?” Z asks “Oh no, I just think you and Og are perfect for the job ha-ha” Frank says and Z, satisfied enough, takes a sip of Chud Lite “Alright, Hanklin. When Og and I get the check, we’ll meet up with you at the bottom level of Soldier Field parking. Until then, just give us a name, tell us where we’re going” Z says and Frank,

mischievously giddy with the knowledge of the man he was about to send two thugs over for a visit, gives another dopey smile.

Ari

Forty thousand dollars Θ‿Θ Forty big ones on Electric Avenue. Your fingers and toes are each worth a grand. Look at them now. Every digit, a whole ass grand. Now double it. We're talking money beyond your fingers and toes. That's how much money Ari had. All the fingers and toes she had… and the ones on Atlas… (Θ⌒Θ)ง

It was late. No, early now □ ˘ ˚ ˘□Zzz. Early morning hours but still dark. Ari, hammered like a nail through the son of God, staggered to her feet. She could see Atlas slumped over on the ground. More drunk than her. Forty grand, she thought with a coon like smile. Forty grand and it could all be hers ლ(`∀´ლ)

Ari creeps up to the supplies tucked to the side of the kitchen counter as there was no closet in their apartment. She takes up the fire axe ⊐——o(`∀´o She holds it firmly in her hands (‘º益º)ノSlowly, she creeps toward Atlas' back. Forty grand dances on her mind. One dollar bill. Forty. *Thousand* of them. It could all be hers. She steps onto Atlas' shadow, tongue rolling her mouth, imagining herself rolling in the dough.

Atlas' head picks up before the axe can crash on it (´･_･`) He looks up to Ari, "Huh? Ari-kun, what are you doing?" ಠ _ ಠ She was deadass in her expression. On God, she was ready to throw the axe up and swing it down on Atlas'

head. “Ari!?” and she did. (ノ`Д´)ノ “Hyrahh!”
ʃ´‖ ͡ ‖ `ʅ “Ar-iiieeee!”

Squeak the axe went against Atlas’ head. The inflatable novelty axe fell to the floor and Ari fell down with it in laughter (≥ ⊎≤) They had won the toy axe from the carnival though they were since banned after Ari got into that fight with the clown girl. What was Ari supposed to do? Handing Atlas a balloon shaped like *that* (。•ˇ‿ˇ•。)

Ari and Atlas nestled against one another on the ground “Tomorrow,” Ari says U w U. She checks her phone OwO “No, *today*. We’ll go to the bank and we’ll be forty thousand dollars richer.” the good life seemed to have finally arrived for ari, no cap. Atlas smiled, “This is it babe. The bank then Mexico. Our lives begin today… I love you, Ari,” She knew he meant it (´∀`)♡ The sound of a trash can being knocked over behind their apartment made Ari jump (∩ˡ□ˡ∩) “What was that?” Atlas struggles to his feet, “Probably that neighbor cat whose name I can’t say feh-heh,” Atlas chuckles, “wooh! I’m feeling tipsy!” ʕ(°▿°)ʔ Atlas heads for the other room in the apartment, “Gonna drain the lizard real quick, babe. We should hit the sack after that.” (- ◡◦)

The buzz has a strong grasp around Ari’s head, already giving the hint of a hangover on the way T_T “Man, I’m wasted too over here. Don’t lock the door again, I might need you to hold my ears, honey.” *Ring* goes the doorbell. It took Ari by surprise. Nobody uses their doorbell. In fact she

had forgotten what their doorbell sounded like. *Ring* it went again. Who the hell could it be? (ಠ ‸ ಠ)

Ari walks up to the door, rubbing her eye (-—_-) Using that eye she peeks through the peephole. She knew she had some simps out there, a couple stans even, but who the hell was the blonde haired guy in the suit holding chocolates? ⊙ ∩ ⊙ “Huh,” Ari thinks, “I’ve never seen this guy before but he seems familiar in a way. Where do I know this guy?” *Ring* Ari watches the man ring the doorbell for the third time. Should she answer? Tell him to go away? Order him to fuck off? She was finna go with the latter. Then she remembered the description Atlas had given to the guy he saw on the highway (;´Д`) It was the man with hella drip and something about hair! Blonde hair it must have been, she realized. “Atlas,” she cries out, ready to run for the fire exit behind their one window. Then she heard the one window in the apartment shatter.

With terror, Ari watches two men slip through the window and into their apartment (≥∩≤)° “Atlas!” She cries again “we gotta bounce!” The two men look her way. A big guy and a skinny one. The skinny one wore a gorilla mask. The big one wore a pig mask. The gorilla points his crowbar to the bathroom door as it opens, “It’s the dude that’s got it,” his muffled monkey voice was all Ari was to hear of the raiders that night.

“What’s going on?” Atlas says, stumbling out of the bathroom, when he sees the two men ಠ o ಠ *CLUNK* The pigman wails down on Atlas with a wrench and he falls to the floor. Ari couldn’t hear Atlas’ scream over her own. It was hard to remember what happened next exactly. She was back at the door, no choice but to open it and face the mystery man. She didn’t see him when she threw the door open. All she saw when she looked back was Atlas, on the ground, holding his head. “But… channel Frederator,” she thought she heard him say. No. No webtoon stardom for Atlas. She left his ass (ง ͡ʘ ͜ʖ ͡ʘ)ง

Outside in the hall, unsure if the men in masks were even pursuing her, Ari dashed away most boobilciously, chest bouncing, no concern for who she gave the show to. But what a show it was, she thought slyly, knowing that deep in the depths of her rockin’ cleavage, was her ticket to forty grand (⌐■_■)

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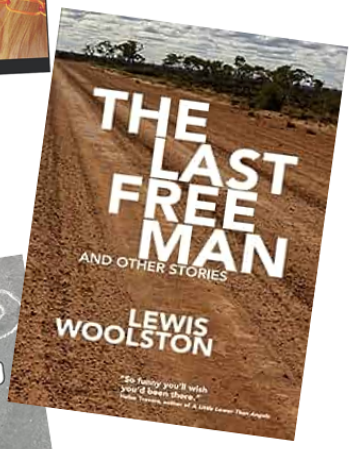

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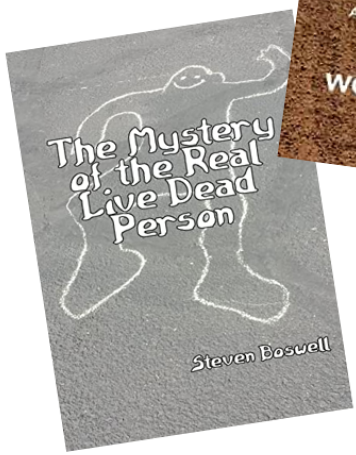

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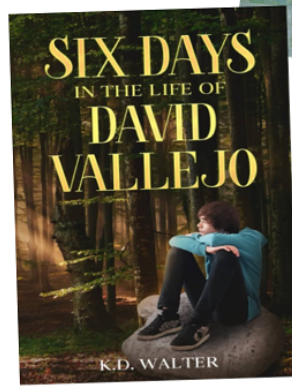

Six Days in the Life
of David Vallejo

by K.D. Walter

Call of Wells Fargo is
proudly sponsored by:

Woolston Three

They would have boogied on down to Electric Avenue sooner if the sign hadn't been stolen.[7] Woolston had insisted to Krake he had been to the road before and it was prone to violent crimes before. He did, in fact, know where it was. But vaguely and after the third time passing by McDonalds? "That't it," Woolston turned suddenly, "we're getting some nuggets." Krake rolled his eyes, "The power of advertising." The scrawny manager inside was named Nigel and he was very annoying asking them all sorts of personal questions. But that was Woolston's job and once he had found Atlas Andersen, he would be asking all the real important questions then.

"Right there," Krake pointed as they were driving down another of the rundown roads on the bad side of the city, "612 Electric Avenue. That's Mr. Andersen's apartment." Woolston cringed, "That shithole? Place looks like it was firebombed. I can see why a guy living here would steal forty grand," Woolston said. "We don't know it was him yet, but yes, that could be a motivator," Krake said.

The narrow three floor tall brick building was on the corner of Electric Avenue and Boogaloo Road, aka pot hole central, aka druggies and dealers central. Of course the elevator was out of service, "Just my luck," Woolston sighed as they

[7] It's called "signaling" and it is a crime.

faced the stairs and went up to the second floor. Going up to the door, after a few breathers, to Andersen's room, Krake interjected, "It's very possible he may have already skipped town, detective." Woolston chuckled, "Hah, that just means he won't mind if we–" Woolston knocked on the door and the impact of his hard knuckles gently pushed the door open. "Oh, the door was open." Krake inspected the side of the door frame, "The hinge was broken open. There was a break-in."

Entering the apartment themselves it was only more evident, "Sweet Baby Jesus," Woolston remarked, "it's like a tornado blew through here." Stools were broken apart in the kitchen and all the drawers were thrown out. The couch was flipped over and cut open and the TV smashed, "Well, they weren't after the TV," Krake said, "Either Mr. Andersen forgot where he put his money or somebody else caught wind of it." Woolston charged forward toward the kitchen, "This is no good. Who else would come looking for this guy?" Krake shrugged, "Maybe our Hanklin character came for his cut. Hard to say until we speak with Mr. Andersen."

Woolston's detective gut was rumbling when he came to the kitchen counter. "Is that a box of heart shaped chocolates," Krake asked. "Kind of out of place, huh?" Woolston looked around for another second before stashing the box of chocolates in the back of his pants. "Isn't that

evidence?" Krake asked. "Sure, we'll take it back to the station. Afterwards, who knows." Woolston grabbed a can of beer sitting undisturbed on the counter. "This? Probably not evidence," he opened the warm can of Chud Lite and began to chug it back. "Detective, you really shouldn't be drinking on the job," Krake said. "Watch it, Krake. This is a thirsty job and we've been running around all day. Plus, I gotta wash those nuggets back somehow."

Krake squinted his eyes, "What was that?" Woolston was surprised, "Sorry, I didn't think you'd hear that." Krake shook his head, "No, not you. I just heard something…" From the only other room in the shitty apartment, the two detectives heard a toilet flush. Woolston and Krake gave a nod to each other, readied their handguns, and prepared themselves behind the bathroom door. "Think it's Andersen?" Woolston asked. "Or his party guests," Krake suggested. They gave another nod then threw the door open, guns aimed on the wretched little man with his head in the toilet.

"Jesus, it smells even worse in here," Woolston gagged, gun aimed on the man on the ground, before casually taking a sip of the Chud Lite in his other hand. "Yep, that's Andersen," Krake said, gun still aimed at the bloodied and toilet water drenched man. "Go away," the man sluggishly waved away at the lawmen. "For the love of Pete," Woolston put away his gun and helped sit up the man against the bathroom wall, "Atlas, I'm detective Woolston," he thought

whether or not to mention Krake, “ugh, and this is Inspector Krake. What the hell happened here?”

Atlas looked bruised in the face and arms. A dark streak of blood was caked to the side of his head and from his nose to his chin. Quite frankly, he looked like somebody who was spit out from a toilet. Life looked to have been very rough for Atlas. “She left me,” Atlas groaned. “Who is *she*?” Woolston asked. “My girl,” Atlas said in a soft, sad breath. At once Woolston felt for the sad, toilet rejected creature. “What were you doing in the toilet?” Krake asked. “He was trying to flush himself,” Woolston said and Atlas nodded, confirming it. “Your girl,” Woolston said, “does she have the money, Atlas?” Atlas didn’t even seem surprised at the mention of the money.

“She had the check,” Atlas said, “forty grand, all on a single check. We were gonna fly to Mexico. Then those two guys broke in and…” “Then what?” Woolston asked. Atlas teared up, “Then she ran away. She left me to them. Two men in animal masks. A gorilla and pig. They knew we had the check. They *knew* it was a check. When I knew she left me for dead I finally gave them a name. Not her real name though but I told them she could be found at the airport, probably trying to get out of the city… we were so close to making it…”

“You really liked her, huh kid? I understand,” Woolston itched at his mighty pompadour, “Was that you who got the chocolates

for her?" Atlas looked confused, "Chocolates?" They called for an ambulance and briefly went over the first room again in the meantime. Krake escorted Atlas to the ambulance where the heavyset black women[8] welcomed them into their carriage. As that was happening, Woolston was eyeing the heart shaped box of chocolates suspiciously, "They weren't Atlas' chocolates… my gut's giving me a bad feeling about these things." His eyes looked up and he saw the one window in the apartment, "Sorry bastard only had one window here, heh. Wait a second. That window has been smashed."

Krake returned from outside, "Bad news, detective. Atlas swears he doesn't know about any Hanklin. He says he just noticed the check on a deposit bag and seized the opportunity. Guess his girlfriend Ari is our next lead. Imagine that, a check made out to cash. Anyone could cash it out. Detective?" Woolston noticed Krake was talking, "Huh? Oh. Sorry," he took another sip of his Chud Lite, "I think this just got more complicated. I didn't notice at first since I was looking at the general mess of things. The window is busted, see? There's glass on the inside too so I think our perps came in from the outside fire exit." Krake inspected the window, "But the door to the outside was broken open from the hall." Woolston's gut was giving him a really bad feeling now, "Our boy

[8] Likely named Tysha and Taysha, I never got her name down.

Atlas had more friends than whoever messed up the place. We're looking at a third party, I think. The window guys were the ones who came in and turned the place over. Door guy," Woolston pat the chocolates, "think he left a gift."

Krake was writing something down in his notepad, "It's possible Hanklin and Wells Fargo both came to collect. Too bad it doesn't seem either side won the squabble. But why leave chocolates? A message?" Woolston took another foamy sip of warm, sweet Chud Lite, "A message I don't like, Krake. I got an idea who might leave something like this but I don't want to believe it. For the boys in the lab for now. Before that though, I see this window is right in view of a certain crime den on Boogaloo Road. I bet my ass a certain someone has a clue where our trouble makers made off. Let's go pay an old friend of mine a visit."

867 Boogaloo Road looked like a bomb had gone off on the top floor. Blast marks around open windows and no roof to speak of. The bottom of it, ironically, featured a colorful flower shop. "Who could you possibly know at a flower shop?" Krake asked. "An asshole," Woolston answered. They rang the bell above the door as they entered and they saw a vaguely female creature behind the counter, browsing a computer, picking her head up. The creature was skinny and dressed like a drug dealer. Her hair was white as snow and her eyes were red like blood. The creature closed her tabs

and smiled, “Wooly Mammoth! The terror of Boogaloo Road! How can I help you today? I can help you right? Please, say yes. I want to be a help. Let me help you, pretty please?”

“Fuck off, Delilah. You know who I’m here to see,” Woolston said, laying the law down on the albino like creature. “Oh gee, really? You’re doing an investigation aren’t you? You could use me for some kind of inflation[9] mission! I’m not bound by the law,” Delilah laughed like a hyena on meth. “Yes, you are. Now shut up and open the doors upstairs. This is a shakedown. *Woolston* style.” Another sip of Chud Lite.

The sun pierced through the snow clouds above, beaming light into the detective's eyes as they entered the room with no roof or wall facing Boogaloo Road. There they saw a rabid looking man in a long coat, eating beans, and watching a tarp cloaked glass screen television. A woman on the TV was showing off her fancy dress in stark contrast to the long haired and bearded drug experimentalist. “Remember,” the woman on TV said, “if it’s Labuschagne then it *has* to be good.” The man chuckled at the TV, “I’d look good in that dress.”

“Hello, Hartley,” Woolston boomed, causing the sickly looking man to leap up, revealing he was only wearing his vaporwave heart's underwear beneath his jacket. “W-Woolston! But I didn’t do

[9] Error, probably meant infiltration. But I’m not sure yet.

anything yet!" "My ass you haven't done anything," Woolston roared. "Detective, who is this man?" Krake asked. Woolston chugged back more of his Chud Lite and let out a satisfied sigh, "Simon S. Hartley. The Sizzler of Boogaloo Road. When he's not fapping[10] in front of traffic up here he's usually a pain in my ass, making me chase him down for some bullshit or another. It just so happens, however, his little villa here is in perfect view…" "Of our crime scene," Krake finished for Woolston.

"Oh that?" Hartley smiled, showing off his grilled teeth, "I might have caught some commotion across the road last night. Or I might have been fast asleep! It's hard to tell, if only you had something to jog my memory." Woolston promptly went up to Hartley and decked him in the face, knocking him on his back and making his legs stick up in the air, "How about letting you off on the hook for being on drugs again!?" "Drugs!?" Hartley made no clue that he was in any actual pain. "What drugs, man!? I'm clean like the green party! Broke like them too! I couldn't afford anything if I wanted to!" Hartely cried out while Woolston sipped more Chud Lite and grabbed him by the ankle, "Don't bullshit me, Hartley! You ate one too many vitamin gummies, didn't you?

[10] Internet slang for mastubrbating.

You're riding the vitamin gummy wave[11], I can see it in your eyes!"

"Detective," Krake gasped, "what are you doing!?" Woolston was hanging Hartley over the broken wall, dangling him over the drop to the road below, "Getting answers! There's about to be another pothole in a minute if he doesn't spill the beans!" "Aiiieeeee," Hartley cried, "I paid for those beans though! Stop!" Vitamin gummies rained out of Hartley as Woolston bounced him over the ledge, "Okay, okay! I saw two guys wearing funny masks! Animal masks! They climbed up the fire escape and smashed the window over there with a crowbar!" Krake seemed a little less on edge, "That does collaborate with Atlas' story." "What kind of car did the masked guys roll up in?" Woolston demanded, heroically sipping the last drops of Chud Lite. "I didn't see, man! They popped out from the alley. Left the same way too. They were almost as slick as the other guy but he didn't wear a mask. Must not be a furry."

Hartley was tossed back onto the floor. "The other guy. What he look like?" Woolston asked. Hartley rubbed at the back of his head, "Weird. A full suit…" "With blonde hair?" Woolston asked. Hartley nodded. "Shit," Woolston cursed. "You have a clue who it was?" Krake asked. "Only a

[11] While it may feel good to eat more than the recommended amount of vitamin gummies, I would still consider this narcotic use.

clue. We thought he headed out to the Dakotas but maybe he never left. It's only a clue, no proof…" But Woolston's gut was telling him otherwise. "Detective, who are you talking about?" Krake asked but it was Hartley who answered with a chuckled, "You're so worried about the blondie, new guy. Forget him! How much do you know about your partner? You know, Wooly and I used to party it up back in the day. We'd pop Flinstone vitamin gummies like the dinosaurs were about to go extinct!" "*What*?" Krake asked. "Yea, we partied," Woolston admitted, "but then Hartley here started going fruitier than fruit loops cereal!" "What the hell are you two talking about?" Krake asked.

Standing up, Hartley showed off his grills again with another smile, "From what I remember, we were both having fun, causing trouble. Then Woolston went off and became a cop with that partner of his." Woolston grabbed Hartley by the collar, "You don't mention my partner. Ever. Those gummies have melted your brain, Hartley." Hartley shrugged, "Hey, those babies give me all sorts of wild ideas beyond ordinary human comprehension! Like, for instance, what if there was, like, um, a world that constituted only chickens? Like a world. But of chickens!" Krake fixed his tie, "That's retarded." "Okay, but I get other ideas too. Like, what if you concentrated and put a lot of pressure on your back in order to grow wings. If you tried hard enough…" "Do you want me to dangle you

over that ledge again and find out?" Woolston asked. "Easy, old friend, I'd rather make it alive to my barber's quartet meetup today," Hartley said. The detectives give each other a look.

When they left through the flower shop again, the detective duo were ambushed by a woman holding a recorder up to them, "Arda Belof, Channel 4 news. Detective Woolston, we received a tip you were in the area for some investigation and just moments ago I caught sight of you dangling a helpless man over a two floor fall." "I knew we would find trouble for that," Krake said. "Get off my back, Channel 4 hussy," Woolston cried, hustling away from the reporter, "I'm busting my ass here doing my job! Why don't you go report some good news for a change!?" The reporter didn't relent, "What more, it appears you're drinking Chud Lite in public." "Have a sip!" Woolston shouted, chugging the empty can of Chud Lite at Arda's head, bouncing the aluminum off her forehead.

"Detective, we really must work on your anger management. Assaulting addicts and reporters isn't going to look good for the police's public image," Krake said. "Stop cramping my style, Krake. If who I think is involved in this then we're in some deep shit. For now, I just wanna know who tipped off those channel 4 chumps I was here so fast!" "Oh that was me," Delilah waved from the down road, "I wanted to do something so I did!" Woolston wished he had another can of

beer. To drink and to throw, “Let’s just get back to the station. See what sticky fingers we find on these chocolates.” “Of course, detective,” Krake said. “Oh, and about what Hartley was saying…” “Don’t worry, detective. I won’t judge you for your past as long as we can stay focused on solving this case.” “No,” Woolston said, “I meant, do you think a person could really grow wings if they tried?”

Krake, ready to change the topic, held still before the car as snow began to fall, “Detective, who is it you think is involved?”

Mike Two

Terror is the eye of the beholder. He saw it in the peephole. He heard it in the screams. In his haunt he beheld a woman. Generous of the bosom. Ripe, an uncle might have said. She fled while he returned. Party over, the son of ma returns, finds the apartment ransacked. Would have had the check already had those goons not shown up. They were gone now. In their place was the man he caught the photo of on the I-90. The photo had led him this far. Now was the time to get creative.

He left the box of chocolates on the counter. A gift to show he cares. The man from the photo doesn't notice he's here. Not even after breaking the door with the paperweight. Mike sits on the couch. He can smell the sex like cigarette smoke off a trucker. Atlas is bloody. He crawls for the bathroom. He moans out the name of his woman. Ari. Ari took the check. Where did you go, Ari? Mike watches and decides there is no value to be found in the man. Cold faced, he looks the room over once again, and enters the cold night.

A fuzzy chill among the icy embrace of the autumn night. Mike looked over his shoulder. He felt an eye on him but as he turned all he saw was the shit of modern development. Debris and rock. There are eyes everywhere, Mike supposed. Grey snow fell in the air. Behind the apartment his eyes found the tracks. Freshly in. Freshly out. The

goons came this way. Who sent them? He didn't know. He did know the man crawling for the bathroom cried that the girl had it. It was a gamble. The girl or the goons? Tonight Mike was feeling open minded. Like a bisexual, he chose both.

He rides in the night. Moon somewhere behind the clouds. He rode on. Following the tracks in the road. The goons would find him the girl. Or they already had the check. Either way, Mike knew, the end of those tracks meant his prize. Like a fat boy, twiddling his sausage like fingers over a box of Trix. The prospected contents tantacling, foaming up behind his lips with anticipation. Yes, Mike was hungry and by daylight he would feast.

The tracks culminated in a van parked in the lot of the Unreal 8 motel. He jots down the license plate in a message to a friend on his phone. He's careful not to send, would be awkward. Mike steps up to the side mirror. He's ready to strike. Stops when he finds the door open and the seats empty. Inside are wrappers and the masks of a gorilla and a pig. These are my boys, Mike thinks, like a mighty little league coach proudly eyeing his players pre-molestation. No ID or guns in the glove department. The goons are inside, Mike realizes. There he goes. Through the front doors like a civilized man.

Behind the front desk is a young man. No, a tomboy. There is a tomboy inside the motel. Shaggy hair, Bears jersey, and even freckles.

Oowie zoowie, the horny goat might bleat. But not Mike. He was a man with class. Awooga would suffice. Yet awooga would have to wait. The tomboy closes her tabs.

Sup, dude? Need a room.

The last room you checked out will do.

What?

What?

A toilet flushes from another room. A large man in a stained sweater exits. He grunts at the tomboy as he passes by. He strides outside and knocks on the van. From the back of the van steps out a man in a green jacket, emerging from a cloud of smoke. The man turned his crooked head and spat.

What the fuck took you so long? How long does it take to take a shit?

Get in van. I know where she'll be.

Mike almost smiles. The goons to the girl then. Mike almost frowns. A camera in the corner of the ceiling. He looks at the tomboy again.

Uh, dude? Did you need something?

What does anyone need?

A bosom for a pillow?

Awooga.

Mike leaves the motel just in time to see the van pull out. Casually, he returns to his vehicle. Before he enters he feels the call. He steps up to the snowbank on the side and lets the world know he was here. The deed done under starlight, he lets the goons take him to his prize.

Frank Five

Good feelings filled Frank like a twink in Poundtown, Illanois. Only instead of poundings it was good feelings. That is to say Frank felt very good on the morning of his second day at his new job. His ride to work was much less dreadful, as Frank, was most certain he had made a smart move last night, hiring two dangerous looking thugs to recover the stolen assets he had misplaced on his first day of work.

“I bet everything is under control by now ha-ha” Frank said as he dug into his morning pancakes, prepared by the loyal family butler, Hairy the Butler. “Sounds like the young master is in good spirits, but what do you mean by under control now” asked Hairy.

Annoyed by Hairy’s talking to him, Frank completely ignored Hairy until he went away. Later he had Hairy drive him back to Wells Fargo, and Frank, hummed a tune. “I want you to wait in the car again until my shift is over, Hairy” Frank said. “Very good, young master” Hairy said, like a good butler. Eyeing the grand building that was Wells Fargo, Frank skips along to his second day, determined to not make another forty thousand dollar variance.

Frank strolled into Wells Fargo with a confident spring in his step, for he knew, tonight, he would collect the check back at the bottom level

of Soldier Field parking. This made him feel very confident and was the cause of the spring in his step. His morning was largely uneventful. He shot finger pistols at Katie as he walked in and Bineville was mostly busy with phone calls so he wasn't able to give Frank too much paperwork to file. On the hunt to find the soda fountain, which Bineville mentioned was downstairs, Frank was on the cusp of having another nice hum as he strode back into the lobby. It was all sunshine and roses, until it wasn't.

Frank's heart nearly exploded like a heart stuffed with dynamite. Police officers! It was police officers, he knew, at once "Holy smokes, there are police officers at Wells Fargo" Frank thinks as he hides behind one of the monolithic pillars of the Wells Fargo lobby. Frank barely takes cover in time but feels the coppers didn't spot him. He was at least able to see that the big one had a pompadour and the taller one had a ponytail, but not much else. "This is bad. If there are cops here then they're probably looking into the variance I caused. Oh man, this is bad. Badder than Baghdad" Frank thinks frantically, from behind the pillar "That's odd, Bineville and Card didn't mention anything about the variance to me so I guess they don't know I fudged anything up yet. But if there are cops here they are most certainly sniffing out trouble. I better go find Jason" Frank thinks, and he did.

The soda room was complete with a tall soda fountain in the middle. It spewed forth a blue green liquid that illuminated the science fiction looking room with a blue green light, which made for an artsy scene where Frank and Jason were hued with a blue green light. Jason was jogging in and when he saw Frank he shouted “Frank! There you are! I just saw the police upstairs!” Frank let out a dramatic “SHHHHHHHHHHHHH! Yell louder why don’t you? But, yea, I just saw them too. They’ve got to be on to us!” Jason puts his hands to his hips, indicating the janitor was rather worried “How’d things go with Z and Og? You get the check back yet?” Frank shakes his head “I’m meeting with them tonight to pick it up. I should have it back here tomorrow. You think there’s time?” Frank asks. “Depends. It’s a race against the police figuring out everything now” Jason says and Frank stomps his foot “I can’t get arrested, Jason! My daddy would be so angry!” Frank yells like a lion “Hey, keep it down, remember? You should try to relax. Nothing to do until the pick-up, right? Relax so you don’t give away that something is wrong” Jason says and Frank thinks it over.

Everything had been going so nice up until the police showed up. Frank was upset. He was angry and upset. He was so angry and so upset he could report somebody’s Amazon book to have it removed. In fact, he was so angry and so upset, he felt he could do it *twice* “This is terrible! Z and Og

better get that check back to me in time so I can fix this. I can't go to prison. I can't watch anime in prison. Who ever heard of a prison where you can watch anime!?"

Frank had no idea how he was supposed to relax with the police poking around. He storms back into the lobby and lets out a frustrated sigh. A voice answers his sigh "You alright, Frank?" It was the goth girl Katie "Huh, oh, hi Katie" Frank felt a little better just having a pretty goth girl ask him if he was okay. He answers "I've been better though, I guess you could say I got riled up with some bad news ha-ha" Frank says "Bad news, huh? Somebody you know die or something?" Katie asks "*What?* Why would you think that?" Frank says "Because. People typically get upset when they hear… uh, nevermind. Must be something else then" Katie says and Frank nods "Yea, just, saw something on the news" Frank lies and Katie shrugs "Fair enough. All the news talks about lately is lame stuff like homelessness, crime rates, and that Project PP" Katie sighs. Frank groans aloud "Ugh, I don't want to hear about PP right now."

Katie looks away, returning to her paperwork, as Frank broods alone. The goth girl lifts up her paper and flicks off a few pieces of rice "Uh, is that rice on your paperwork?" Frank asks, sounding confused "Yes it is. These detectives came by a few minutes ago and one of them spilled their food all over my paperwork" Frank feels a

tinge of fear “Oh yea? Ha-ha what were they here for?” Frank asks “I don’t know. Wanted to talk to Mr. Card. Their names were Woolston and Krake, I think” Katie says and Frank makes a mental note “Woolston and Krake, huh?”

“You look nervous, Frank” Katie says, making Frank feel even more nervous, like he was being interrogated by the two detectives “Who me!? Nervous?” Katie nods “Yea, because the cops are here” Frank was down right terrified “I d-didn’t do anything!” Katie practically ignores the remark “I get it. I don’t like cops either, they’re ultra lame” Frank blinks dumbly “Oh, uh, you think that too ha-ha?” Frank asks “Yea, cops are always giving me and my friends shit when we’re out. You know, Frank, my friends tonight are doing a D&D campaign I died in last sesh so I’m free if you wanted to hang out” “D&D is for fucking nerds” Frank blurts “w-wait, did you say you wanted to hang out tonight, Katie?” Katie, who looked as nervous as Frank did a moment ago, nods her goth head, “Uh, yeah, you seem alright so why not? Mr. Card is always annoying me with small talk and Bineville is creepy with all his staring. I feel like you actually might be fun to hang out with.”

Frank can’t believe it “I can’t believe it! I’ve got a date with a goth girl!” Katie gives him her address and once again all is rainbow and roses for Frank. As he skips along in the lobby, he stops “But wait. If I’m hanging out with Katie tonight,

how am I going to pick up the check from Z and Og? I can't screw this up and not get the check but I also can't pass up this opportunity to get with a goth girl who asked *me* out! Hmm. Whatever I do, I have to play this very, *very* carefully."

Woolston Four

Woolston couldn't have parked more carelessly in front of the police precinct. What were they going to do? Give him a parking ticket? Screw'em! He knew they didn't have the grapes.[12] He could sure go for some grapes now that he thought about it.[13] Well, not grapes per-se, but something grapey. Ice cream was a safe bet. Grape donuts? Grape rice? Could that be good?

"Are you even listening to me, Woolston?" Boomed the angry voice of the very angry Chief Hayes. "How can I not with you yelling like that?" Woolston asked, comfortable in his chair before the desk of his superior. "How can you not do your job without causing another damned incident!? All you had to do was look into a larceny case, Woolston! How does that lead to you assaulting a reporter!?" Hayes yelled, giving Woolston the business with his fabled Hayes Gaze, a burning stare down Woolston could feel from behind the chief's sunglasses. "Assaulting, eh? From what I recall, all I did was throw an empty beer can at'er!" Woolston said. Hayes was fuming by this point, "Why were you drinking on the job!?" Woolston adjusted his tie, "Well, you see, it was important to the case." "*How!?*" "I was thirsty."

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[12] Testicles
[13] Not testicles.

Hayes' face was growing red and he stood from his chair, "Do you have any idea how far the mayor is up my ass over this, Woolston!? Do you have any idea whatsoever how far he's gone to get up in there and tug at my heartstrings? My heartstrings, Woolston, from right out my ass. He's pounding me *and* taking me out to dinner. You know what's going to happen now?" Hayes asked angrily. Krake spoke up from his chair, "Chief, while Detective Woolston's conduct was by no means appropriate, I would say for the most part we are making progress on the case."

Then it happened. The sunglasses came off and even Woolston felt a very terrible chill rush across his body. His sunglasses removed dramatically, Hayes stared down the two detectives with his eyes on open display. Few had ever seen Chief Hayes' eyes. Few ever had to taste the fury of the Hayes Gaze, unrestricted by the abyssal wall that was his designer Labuschagne shades. Woolston was one of the few that faced such legendary ire on rare occasions. Like those previous times, he was just as soul piercing with his stare. For Chief Hayes had distinct eyes unlike any other man. Long lashes, watery sapphire eyes, and eyes themselves triple the size of lesser men. They were great eyes. Beautiful eyes. Terrifying eyes.

"Now you listen here, Woolston, and you listen good. The mayor, his cabinet, hell, his kitchen drawers too. They want our image to clean

itself. They want you to get your act together. I'm told Chester Colt won't be blabbering on the news about your little stunt today. That's why you're still on the case. That's why you still have a job. But there's no more string pulling after this. You solve the case clean like or you clean out your office."

Woolston was sunk back petrified in his chair. Squirming like a bug suffering from PTSD flashbacks of the bug war. This was the power of the Hayes Gaze when unleashed at full power. "Stop being dramatic," Krake said to Woolston, "Chief, I can assure you Woolston will behave himself better going forward. Another day and we should have the case solved."

Just then the door to the office swung open and Chief Hayes returned his sunglasses to his head, freeing Woolston of the judgemental wave thrusted upon him. It was Angels Boswell and he had some news, "It's Angels Boswell and I have some news," said Angels Boswell, who had some news. "We ran those fingerprints we found on the chocolates Woolston brought back. Turns out they're a perfect match to the guy responsible for the Rubber Bass Fiasco a couple years back," said Boswell. "Mike," Woolston cursed under his breath. "So it is this Mike character then?" Krake asked. "I never said that. Just matches the prints to a previous culprit we lost track of," Boswell said, holding up the box of chocolates in its evidence bag to inspect it thoughtfully.

Woolston stood up and snatched the chocolates from Boswell, “I’ll be taking those.” Hayes was back at it with the yelling, “That’s evidence, Woolston!” Woolston smiled, “Correction. It was evidence. Now I need it for the case.” “There’s one other thing,” Boswell added suddenly, “it’s regarding Mancuso. He finally woke up at the hospital.” Another chill came to Woolston, “I just talked to him on the phone yesterday. The hell happened?” Woolston asked. “Took a suspect into custody and it didn’t end well for him. Thing is, we ran the prints from the scene there too. Another match, same as the chocolates,” Boswell said. “By God,” Hayes sat back down, “this is a crime spree. Woolston…” Woolston grunted, “I’m handling it, damn it. Boswell, what he’d do to Mancuso?” Boswell was quiet for an eerie moment, “The suspect… he gave him an atomic wedgie. He might not sit the same ever again.”

Woolston bursted out of the office like a fat man who had eaten too much explosives. Krake chased after him, “Detective,” he said. “What was that back there?” Woolston asked. “What was what?” Krake asked. “Saying we were close to solving the case? You realized we’re at a dead end? All we know is there’s a ghost back in town and that forty grand is more than likely long gone,” Woolston said. “I said that because I believe it’s true. We clear our heads and look over the facts and we’ll spot something new,” Krake said.

“Sounds like we’re done for the day. Maybe tomorrow you’ll realize how pointless this case really is,” Woolston began to walk away.

“Detective,” Krake went after Woolston. “Stop following me, Krake. We are not partners, okay? I let you tag along for the day and now I can see you’re as pointless as to have around as this case is.” Krake looked at the chocolates Woolston was holding, “What will you do now then? Eat evidence?” Krake asked. “Fuck off, Krake. I’m done for the day. Go ahead and think over whatever details you think you missed. I’m going out for a ride on my own.”

A ride for Woolston constituted driving recklessly down Bellingham Boulevard, getting drunker, swerving into traffic and out of the way at the last second, and throwing more empty cans out the window and toward Channel 4’s news station. Bellingham turned to Boogaloo and before Woolston knew it he was watching the sunset on the broken floor of the flower shop with his old pal Hartley, cracking open a few cold ones for old time’s sake. “I’m sorry for dangling you over the edge,” Woolston said as he was sobbing, as he was now sad drunk Woolston, “I was a total ass for that.” Hartley shrugged, “It’s cool, bro. You were in the moment. Shit happens.”

Woolston staggered to his feet, “That’s just all of life! Shit happens! A man steals forty grand from Wells Fargo. Shit happens! A hardboiled detective at his wit’s end dangles his old science

class partner over his death. Shit happens! Said detective hasn't seen the love of his life in months because he isn't good enough. He's just a piece of shit and shit happens!" The sobbing resumed until there was no more Chud Lite to down his hatch. "I can't take the sadness anymore, old friend. This is it," Woolston said and Hartley jumped to his feet, "Wooly, no! Don't jump off the ledge, you still have so much to live for!" Woolston blinked at Hartley, "Huh? I meant I was going to go see Sheila. I wasn't going to jump. What the hell, man? Also, what exactly do I have to *live* for?" A dark glint appeared in Hartley's eyes as he bowed his head menacingly, "Seeing exactly what this world has coming to it."[14]

Bumping down the potholes and doing donuts in front of Waldonuts in order to hype himself up, Woolston cruised down to 5309 Hamilton Lane. Across the long yard with shabby flamingos and, to his drunken eyes, equally looking drunk gnomes, Woolston stumbled up to the suburban house. The moon was bright in the chilly sky, snow crunching under his mighty weight, Woolston pounded on the front door, "Sheila!" Angry drunk Woolston yammered, "It's me! We have to talk about society and women!" Ooh he was angry now! The liquor was whispering in his steadfast ears: Woolston, baby, let her have it!

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[14] You know what he's talking about.

The door opened.

There she was. Sheila. Such features she had. Eyes, nose, mouth. The whole shabang! They were pretty eyes too. Cute nose. Pink lips made for kissing as Woolston explained to the mayor at that one Christmas party, back when he was able to be happy drunk Woolston. But what a figure to boot! A motherly figure. Made with love. She brushed aside her raven black hair and rubbed the sleep out of her eyes. With that voice stolen from a chain smoking Scottish angel she said, "Alright, Lewis," her voice was tired. Strained, "Let's."

Woolston gulped. Talk about women and society? He just drove up to the love of his life in a drunken stupor and *that's* what he said? Woolston thought quite agonizingly then: Liquor! What the fuck was *that*!? But he had no choice. He was here. The words were said. He wanted to see Sheila so bad and if this was the way then so be it. He went with it. "Uh, err, yea. Um, women, you know? They're great for society," Woolston slurred. "Yea?" Sheila said, free of expression on her face. Woolston nodded, "Yea! Like, I mean, I think society is too hard on women. Shit happens, right? Women should have vending machines." "Vending machines?" "Vending machines! Just for women. Society's way of saying thanks…for being women." Sheila frowned, "Lewis…" Hot tears were building back up in Woolston's eyes, "Also for saying thanks to YOU, Sheila. For, you know,

being the most beautiful woman I have ever known."

There he stood. Drunken fool. Cheeks red by the glow of the moonlight's kiss. But it was her he wanted. More than anything in the world. Head down, he spoke, "I miss you, Sheila." Sheila came to life then, "Then come home you great big piece of shiet! Do you have any idea how long it's been since I've seen you!? It's been months, Lewis! I haven't seen ya since ya told me ya needed a break to focus on your work and stuck me with the bill at the restaurant. What was it? The one that was just smashed with a car on the news." Woolson chuckled, "Oh, the sushi place? Yea, that was me." "YOU smashed through it with a car? That was you!?" Woolston sighed, "It gave me bad memories when I saw it. I was in my car pursuing a culprit and all my anger suddenly conestranted over that overpriced shithole."

Sheila was totally livid, "I am totally livid! Ya act like we're divorced or something, Lewis! Don't you WANT to be a father to your daughter!? For fook's sake, where have you even been sleeping this entire time?" Sheila roared like a lion who had just found out his gazelle eating speedrun had been defeated. "I've been sleeping in my office," Woolston said. "Oh fook me, Lewis, just stay home. Your daughter needs you. I need you! I'm naught letting you dick around and missing out on Christmas. I'm naught!" Woolston could see the tears forming in Sheila's eyes now, "Sheila, wait,

look…" Woolston presented Sheila with the heart shaped box of candies. Sheila took the box, "Lewis…this doesn't make it right. This…"

"Daddy?" The tiny voice came from behind Sheila. There she was. The little one. Wrapped up in her flamingo pajamas, looking up wide eyed to her father. "Lewisa!" Woolston cried, taking her in for a hug. "Daddy smells like silly water," Lewisa giggled. "Aye, he does," Sheila growled softly. "Oh, daddy's missed you, little one," Woolston laughed, a happy drunk, if only for a moment. "Are you sleeping in your office with mommy tonight, daddy? Or are you sleeping in your away office," Lewisa cooed with a tinge of sadness. Sheila looked to Woolston expectantly. "Sweety…" Woolston began.

But then Sheila shrieked. She shrieked so suddenly she had become Shriekla! Little Lewisa jumped into her daddy's arms and Woolston cried, "What!? What is it!?" Then Sheila pointed, "There's a man in our house!" For a moment Woolston was struck with omega fear. He thought with terror: *Mike*. But as he held Lewisa in one arm and flung out his gun he found he was aiming at none other than his partner Krake! "Krake?"

Krake was standing ominously over in the dining room, "Hello, detective," he said and then there was a sudden flash of lightning! "Was that lightning?" Krake asked aloud, looking moderately surprised at the windows. "What are you doing here, Krake!?" Woolston yelled. "I followed you

here to make sure you wouldn't hurt yourself. I tried to catch you at that flower shop but the white haired gremlin there insisted there was a clown in their basement," Krake said. "Okay, but if you followed me here then why didn't you pull into the driveway and meet me at the door? Why the hell did you go in through the back?" Krake shrugged, "I don't know, I just thought it would be a good idea."

Sheila pinched between her eyes in frustration, "Are all the cops in this city drunkards?" "I'm not drunk, I'm autistic," Krake said to another flash of lightning, "Huh, that's so weird." Woolston put away his gun. But he was drunk so he spent a moment trying to stuff Lewisa into his hoster. Lewisa giggled and Woolston figured out what was going on and actually put his gun away, "What's the big idea anyways, Krake?" Krake cooly walked up to the Woolston family, "It's as I said. I wanted to make sure you didn't hurt yourself." "That's considerate," Sheila. "Yea," Woolston grumbled. "So this is your new partner?" Sheila asked. This time Krake looked to Woolston expectantly. "He is," Woolston mumbled. "Since you're safe at home, did you want to call it a night, detective?" All eyes were on Woolston.

Sheila ran Lewisa back to her room as fast she could in order to return to the door and start cursing the day she met Woolston. "Gone for months and you show up drunk just to leave again!? When will it end, Lewis!? When will it

end!? You fookin' bastard!" Woolston slammed his ass into the passenger seat of Krake's vehicle, "Arrgh. Hurry it up, there's not a moment to lose." Krake looked at Woolston curiously, like a monkey eyeing a fruit he just saw his monkey bro die foaming at the mouth after eating, wondering maybe not me, "Tell me, detective. You seemed ready to all but quit the case when we were back at the station. Why the sudden resolve? I hope it's not just the liquor." Woolston smiled, "It's completely the liquor. But also, I don't know. Seeing Sheila again. I know she wanted me to stay. Probably should have too. But seeing her reminded me why I do my job, to make this city a better place."

A vase smashed across the front window of the car as Sheila cursed, "Ya fookin' bastard!" Krake frowned at the new crack on his window, "I was under the impression you were divorced and homeless." Woolston laughed, "Not yet, Krake. Not yet. Now hit the road. I just had one hell of a realization that might just crack this case." Now Krake looked doubtful. He started the car, "Is that so? Where to, detective?" Woolston smiled, "McDonalds."

Og

They called him the meat man. The man of meat. Used to work in a butcher shop. Still handles the meat. Always handles the meat. Tonight the meat was named Ari. Meaty hands on the wheel of the car, Og was driving through the night, a man on a mission. A beast on the hunt.

Z was bitching as always. *Where are we going? The hell kind of hunch do you have? Why aren't you talking? You got real psycho vibes, you know that? You gotta pull over to take a shit? I thought we were on the clock!* So much whining, Og thought. Og was a man of few words. What really ever had to be said aloud in life? Og could get through months with a couple of well timed grunts. Z didn't know when to shut up.

"Here," Og finally said, pulling the van over to the side.

"Here?" Z asked, craning his head out the window.

"Here," Og said, bringing the van to a stop.

The voice on the radio was speaking with static in his mouth, "Development of Project PP is reportedly moving 'light years' ahead of schedule. Billionaire philanthropist Elroy Melonbust is rumored to make his announcement of the project as early as tom-" Og switched the radio off.

"What are we doing *here*, Og? Hanklin said the check came from Wells Fargo. Why would this,

eh what was her TikTok handle? Why would this *Ari* chick be coming to some dingy Wells Fargo bank?"

"Where else she get money?" Og asked.

"Let me rephrase my question. She just ran from her apartment knowing two guys had just broken in. The boyfriend said she works at the airport. We should be trying to cut her off at O'Hare!"

Dumb fuck, Og thought crassaly in his head, yet the imposingly sized man kept his mouth shut. Yes, Ari worked at the airport. So the boyfriend said. But where to even start looking if she went there? Would they just grab her in a terminal if they spotted her? No. She was being chased. Og was sure of it. She would panic. She would try to cash out first. The nearest bank on the way from her apartment to the airport?

"Freezing my nuts off here, turn the heat up," Z said.

Og was getting annoyed. But then the great moment came. A taxi pulled up. The great moment of the unspoken *I told you so* arrived with the young woman Ari, stepping out of the taxi. Z rolled his eyes and muttered out a, "Whatever. That's her."

Ari was hustling for the front doors of the 24/7 downtown Wells Fargo. Her hand was reaching for the door but Z's grip found it first, "Can I get that for you, ma'am?" Z asked with a crooked smile. Ari went white and gasped. She

stepped back and bumped right into the girth of the formidable Og. Lifting up his hefty hand, Og slumped his palm over Ari's shoulder. Gently, but firmly, he directed her toward the van.

It went as easy as that. Ari was escorted to the back of the van and the pair of criminals were back on the road. "Shouldn't we just frisk her?" Z asked. But Og didn't reply. Ari had given them trouble. Ari had seen them without their masks now. Special circumstances called for special procedures. That's what the butcher shop had taught Og.

"P-please," Ari begged, eyes tearing up, "I hid the check. It's back at the apartment, we have to go back. It's not on me, listen to me, please!"

Og glared at the rearview mirror. Crocodile tears, he thought, "Is in your tits, isn't it?" Ari's face grew cold and Og said, "Z find it."

And Z did. Then Ari's tears became very real.

The van reached its new destination, the frozen pond side shack looking like a wrinkly old wizard buried in his own great beard and mane. A hideout hidden by snow, the white van blended in with the snowbanks. They took Ari inside and the begging went on. Z was shouting. Whining, really. Og wasn't sure which of the two annoyed him more. But Z was promising to make the trade the next night with Hanklin. Good, Og, thought. They got the check in a single night and now all he had to do was wait.

Og reclined in the living room chair as the heater hummed. He switched on the game as the other two yelled over the other. A very surreal memory of Og struck him as his old man had. He remembered his father sitting in the very same chair he was in now. Back in the brief time he was small in the world. Papa Og, a real piece of work, his home a castle of pain and tears. Og took a sip of a freshly opened Chud Lite, recalling how he used to want to be just like his old man.

Frank Six

What were the chances, Frank wonders. A date with a real goth girl! Last he checked he was still alive but it felt like, he had gone to heaven. There was just one pesky problem. Earlier, he had agreed to collect that awkward check of forty grand from those thugs he hired. Risky business, Frank thought, but who else better to trust, than his trusty butler, Hairy!

"Risky business" asked Hairy the butler "is this at all related to the date, young master?" "Of course it is" Frank boomed loudly "which is why I need you to pick up something from work at the bottom level of Soldier Field parking." Unless an alien invasion happened, Frank was dead set on going on his date, with the goth girl, Katie Walter. "Goodness, they have you running errands already" Hairy said, stupidly, Frank thought. "Easy enough for the likes of you to understand" Frank giggled "it was you after all who realized how great of a worker I would be for the bank" Frank said and Hairy bowed his head in acceptance of this obvious truth.

"All it is is a check" said Frank. It was almost time for the date and so Hairy went to drop Frank off in front of the house Katie had told him to go to, and the butler was off on his errand to collect the check.

Frank thought that Katie Walter lived in a funny looking house. In fact, it didn't look like a house at all "Strange, it doesn't look like a house at all" Frank said, aloud. Instead of looking like a house, to Frank, it looked like an ordinary building. Blocky, bricky, pact between two other similar looking buildings. As far as Frank could tell, they didn't even have a scenic pond let alone a hedge maze. It was so strange to Frank, he felt the place could be described as ominous. It was also dark, out. Meaning that added to the spooky factor. But Frank is into spooky stuff most of the time and he knew inside that building was his goth girl date, so it was all okay.

Frank pounded his fist on the chipped door of 616 Orlick Avenue. After a moment of pounding hard and making a cat cry out somewhere, and making a light in the next building turn on, the goth girl of his dreams answered. "Hi, it's me, Frank" said Frank. But something wasn't right. Katie didn't look right to Frank. He leaned over towards it and squinted his eyes dramatically. It took Frank a moment but he realized with his facial pattern recognition abilities that this was in fact somebody else. "Katie" the new goth girl yelled "your date's here!" "Let him in!" Called Katie, who Frank couldn't see, because she was in another room. "Come in" said the new goth girl. With a happy grin, Frank entered.

Frank walked into the living room. He saw a beat up sofa with a TV with a Switch. There was a

cat sleeping in the corner and there was a beanbag in the other corner “Wow, it looks like a poor people’s house like in the movies” Frank said, noticing the occupants in the back. At the table in the back were four people, including the goth girl who let Frank in as she had just re-joined them.

Katie ran down the stairs but Frank was too slow on the up take to catch any bounce action “Hi, Frank” she said “ready to head out?” Frank smiled “Boy you’re looking pretty tonight, Katie. But who are all these people living in your house?” Frank asked, eyeing the four people playing some kind of game at the back table. There appeared to be two goth girls at the table looking kind of like Katie. But the two guys were very strange, looking, to Frank. One was dressed up like a Roman solider and the other seemed much older than the rest, wearing a white robe, and sporting a beard too.

“Oh those are my roommates” Katie said. “Roommates?” Frank asked. Katie nodded “I guess I should introduce you to them. The girl who let you in is Lizzy. Lizzy Milieu.” “Sup” said Lizzy from the table. “Next to her is Ebony. Ebony Dark'ness Dementia Raven Way” Katie said, looking at her phone contact for reference. Ebony looked over with a scowl “Whatever, your date looks like a poser” Katie pointed to the young guy wearing the Roman armor “That’s Anthony, we like to call him Roman Anthony. He likes to LARP” said Katie “He also likes to play as a

Roman character in our DnD campaigns even though it doesn't make any sense" said Lizzy. "That's not true, there's plenty of magical reasons for a 3rd century Roman centurion to be isekai'd into a fantasy world" said Roman Anthony. "Lastly" Katie said, lastly "the guy in the robe is Varg. Everybody, this is Frank from Wells Fargo" Katie said.

Varg rose from the table and went over to inspect Frank "You possess a queer aura about you, Frank, and a queerer phenotype. Portuguese maybe? No, a tinge of nord. Hm, those eyes, like a shark's eyes" Varg closed his eyes, put a finger to his temple, and raised up his other hand in a priestly manner "Hmm, yes. The blood of an explorer courses in your veins. I sense it in your very destiny" Varg's bloodshot eyes opened wide "You, Frank. An explorer among the stars" Varg said. Frank giggled "Your uncle is kind of silly ha-ha" Katie sighed "He's not my uncle, he just helps pay the rent, though technically he's not a registered occupant of the apartment." Varg frowned "I still pay my rent."

"Geez Louise, Katie, why do so many people live here?" Frank asked. Katie shrugged "Rent's expensive, dude. Sometimes it takes five people to afford a single place" Frank chuckles "Wow, that's crazy ha-ha. That many?" A sad look crept up on Katie "We actually had another roommate before. Adem. But he got human trafficked last winter." Frank nods "Gee, that

sucks, but I know what you mean, my butler took forever getting through traffic to drop me off here ha-ha." Frank wasn't sure why, but everyone was giving him cold looks for some reason, and that added to the spookiness the building was already giving him.

"Anyways" Katie said "Frank and I are going to head out. You guys have fun with the campaign" Varg crossed his arms wizardly "I'm wrapping the session up actually. Once Lizzy decides if she's going to sacrifice the baby to the Orators or not!" Varg yelled back to the table "I'm still weighing the pros and cons!" Lizzy yelled back "After that" Varg said "Anthony and I are going out to the barcade." "Barcade?" Frank asked "It's a bar with arcade machines. It's stupid" Katie said "Ooh! Let's go there!" Frank insisted.

"Are you seriously going out with that guy? He's like, forty" said Ebony "I'm thirty" Frank corrected "Well everyone have fun tonight, I got to go to work anyways" said Lizzy, who was going for her backpack hanging on the coat rack "Very well" said Varg "I shall give Katie and Frank a ride to the barcade."

Frank and his goth date were given a ride then all the way to the barcade, which was like a bar but with an arcade inside of it "Wow, I can't believe I'm going out drinking with a goth girl and playing arcade games with her and stuff" Frank just had to declare when he saw the barcade, glowing like a jack-o-lantern in the November

night. Frank thought it was a cool looking building and could see people were filling inside it which kind of made him nervous but it was okay, as he had friends with him. Inside the barcade was the bar, followed by the arcade, in the back. There were lots of hipster types inside, people who looked like they wrote literature and posted it online. Frank had a funny feeling, somehow, he was superior to these people, so he felt confident in his skin. He was also glad there wasn't any Nazis around as far as he could tell, which made this place way better than the last bar, he was at.

The jukebox was playing Neil Cisierega's hit album Spooky Phone which Frank recognized because he was into that kind of stuff, and so he said "Hey, that's Semon Demon playing" and he thought he was very cool for pointing it out. Then Frank saw the bartender. She was a cute, Japanese girl with a headband and flat chest, but Frank didn't mind that because he thought she was cute.

"Konnichiwa" the Japanese cutie says with a high pitch and feminine voice. The girl looks like an anime character straight out of an anime, Frank thinks. "What can I get you American-kun?" The bartender coos. Frank chuckles "Look, Katie. She looks like an anime character" Frank thought Katie had gas with the funny look that appeared on her face "Um, we'll just take two Saccharines" Katie was quick to say but Frank was just happy she didn't want a smelly Chud Lite. The bartender poured two pink and bubbly drinks and Katie took

her glass up and said “Here, Frank. First rounds on me. Cheers” “Cheers” Frank cheered, and they tinged their glasses and the fun began in full earnest.

Frank thought the first drink tasted kind of funny and Eastern but the next drink he got was a Bloody Meridian while Katie got a Blacked Russian. Then they went to the arcade area and played some Monkey Puncher, Trap Star, Vampire the Masquerade Pinball, and Wenyu 3 which Frank thought was better than 2. Frank was surprised when Katie kicked his butt at each of these games as he thought he was a pretty pro gamer and that girls weren’t as gamer inclined as guys but he always thought that was just him being judgemental. Now Frank knew for certain girls could be good at games but it still bummed out his mood a little. Then Katie invited Varg and Roman Anthony over and they faced off in 2v2 Pac Man and Frank was happy he and Katie won.

Frank was already feeling buzzed after his second drink but Roman Anthony returned with two Butterflies since they were the ones who won the game “Hey, all these games remind me of a certain urban myth I’ve read about” said a now drunk Frank “It’s called Polybius. I actually-” Katie pulled him aside “Oh my God! Frank, this is my song! Let’s dance” Frank was stunned “Huh? Dance? But I don’t know how to dance. I’d rather talk about myself instead” Frank said. Katie was shaking her head as guitar strings being plucked

rhythmically filled the room. It was I Gotta Feeling by the Black Eyed Peas playing, Frank realized, and Katie was already beginning to bob up and down to the song “Come on, Frank. Live a little! All you gotta do is move your body” Frank was nervous despite the drinks in him “Hm, well, I guess any idiot can do that” and he just knew he was the smartest man in the barcade so he *had* to be the best dancer too.

They danced, they drank, they laughed. Frank was baffled why he never left his room before. Maybe, just maybe, he thought, Daddy Dearest accidentally had a point about getting a job if it meant dancing with banging goth girls like Katie Walter. “Hey, come on, Frank, I want to hear about that Polybius story you were saying” said Roman Anthony “Forget that” said Varg who was getting jiggy with it now “I am sufficiently drunk enough now to talk about eugenics in public” he said as he crouched his knees and pointed his fingers back and forth to the ceiling. Katie rolled her eyes “Let’s bounce, Frank” she held up her iphone “I got the Black Eyed Peas on Spot-a-Fly, let’s hit up the whole town tonight.” Frank’s eyes, were beaming.

Conceivably, a montage of Frank and Katie proceeds to I Gotta Feeling, with Katie pulling Frank by the hand as they run across town, where they go sneak into a showing of Savage Green on Ice “But Katie” Frank says “we didn’t pay for tickets, we’re breaking the law by not paying”

Katie giggles “Shhh, tonight we’re alive, Frank. So let’s live it up!” The action on the ice gave them a great show until it started to get boring, then they snuck back out half way through and went to get kebabs and had a drunken kebab-sword fight! Then they went to the park and threw kebab crumbs for the homeless and then they skated across the frozen pond, fumbling over and laughing as they did.

Then Katie got an idea “I got an idea, let’s go to Chinatown, there’s a Kabuki Theater there we can check out.” The theater was outside and there were men dressed up like women dressed up like kabuki people and they were reenacting the fall of Edo castle from what Frank could tell. They were enjoying some Kuri Popcorn when someone came up from behind “Katie? Katie is that you? I thought, h-hey, what’s going on here?” Frank turns and sees a man dressed in black with glasses “Oh hey, Waldun” says Katie “I thought you got my message.”

The man named Waldun, who looked both Asian and ready to cry, fixes his glasses “Yes, the message about meeting in front of my shop. I thought we had a date tonight Katie, eh, who is this with you?” Waldun asks. Katie wraps her arm around Frank, which gave Frank very funny feelings he didn’t mind “This is Frank. My boyfriend” “B-Boyfriend?” Waldun and Frank each stammer. “Yes, Waldun. My boyfriend. You can stop bothering me online now that you see he’s

real" Katie said. Waldun shakes his head "No, this can't be right. I thought we had a thing going, Katie!" Katie sighs "Waldun, you're like 40, and you have kids you should be taking care of. I'm not a girl into that kind of scene, you should focus on them and your donuts before dating twenty years below your age."

Waldun was ready to break down "I'm ready to break down. K-Katie, I even brought you a special gift" Waldun reached into his coat and offered a small mirror to Katie. Katie cringes at the mirror. Seeing this, Frank smacks the mirror out of his hands. As the mirror falls, Katie says "I don't want your stupid gifts, Waldun" The mirror broke on the ground "No!" Waldun cries "That was a gift to my grandfather from the emperor!" "From Star Wars?" Frank asks "China" Waldun says "Mm" said Frank.

"I don't believe it" Waldun said "oh it's a dark day for academia when an erudite such as myself believes this ruse of you two dating" Waldun coped. Frank leans over to Katie "Is he talking about My Hero?" Katie sighed again "Alright, this should make it clear" Katie took Frank by the head and planted a kiss on him "Gee willikers! Kissed by a goth girl" Frank says with euphoria. "I-I don't want to see this" Waldun blushes as he looks away "I-I don't want to see my partner kissing another man until marriage" "Waldun, just scram already" Katie said and Waldun couldn't scramble to scram faster.

“He seemed upset” Frank said “Eh, he’ll buy a new coat and feel better, I know the guy. Anyways, I guess I should apologize, Frank. The whole point of this date was just to put on a show for a guy who couldn’t take a hint. He knows my roommates so you were my go to guy” Katie explains. “Wait, what do you mean?” Frank asks, confused “You’re a nice guy, Frank. Really. I actually did have fun tonight. *Maybe* we’ll do something again another time.”

“Ah, you’re breaking up with me” Frank says. Katie rolls her eyes “Oh God…” A flash of lightning occurred “Was that lightning?” She asks “Ah-ha! A sign from the demiurge” Frank says with a smile “sudden flashes of lightning indicate their disapproval! Maybe *now* I can convince you to go steady with me, by talking about the books I’ve written!” Another flash of lightning “That was a flash of approval” Franks says “Oh, you’re one of those self-pub guys, aren’t you?” Frank puts on his biggest smile “Uh-huh! I’m pretty big on the scene. Might even say I’ve inspired others…*sometimes in ways I don’t approve of*…but it’s like a writing renaissance!” If you can come up in a Google search, you made it, as far as Frank saw.

Katie took out a cigarette, lit it, and took a drag “A writing renaissance, huh? You know, I’m pretty into the whole writing scene regrettably. Poetry, really, but I see what people are saying all over on the internet. From what I’ve seen? There’s

no renaissance for writing going on. Not on the internet. Certainly not on Barnes & Noble bookshelves either. But, you know, something is happening online. Something *is*, like, blossoming. People are trying new things, people are just, you know, *trying*. Projects, collaborations, critiques, reviews. The scene is just starting, Frank. Gravity is just waiting to do its thing. We're not in any renaissance. But maybe, just maybe, we'll look back on what people are doing today, as a kind of classical period."

"Homp! Hurrmp, Ahmm. Ah" Frank yawned dramatically. Katie put her cigarette back between her charcoal lips "Looks like it must be close to your bedtime. Good night, Frank" Katie blew some smoke before kissing Frank on the cheek. Frank's eyes widened and Katie took her leave "See you at work" Katie called out. "W-work?" Frank remembered then "Oh fuck" He knew Hairy would be waiting for him with the check. But Hairy wasn't answering his phone "Lazy butler" Frank cursed "Oh well" Frank looked to the night sky "A date with a goth girl, and kissed by her too. I don't mind a little walk tonight."

It was a scenic walk for the buzzed and love struck Frank. The stars were shining through the clouds and just a bit of snow was blowing in the air. He made it to the gates of his manor, smiling happily. But then the good times came to an end. Frank's heart raced, his eyes peeled up in shock, as

he turned to answer the heavy voice speaking "Hello, Frank."

Mike Three

Mike spat. Spit mixed into snow. Snow mixed into mud. Mud mixed into crusted forgotten essence. He was parked over a view of his prize. Across the low-incoming cluster. Beside the lonely pond. A snowed-in cabin. It was inside. He could have had it by now. Could be eating dinner. Feet crossed under the wheel. Eyes on the prize. Occasionally flickered to the rear-view. To the power plant behind the fence. A skeletal series of steel beams blocking the natural light of the day. Now there was only night. Darkness. The wait.

A light shined through his windows coming from the way he came. Face of stone, his eyes cracked from the cabin, beheld a food truck. A vessel of grease beyond human comprehension, cloaking the man in his suit in a visage of gold. Mike stepped out of his vehicle and departed from the food truck were three men. Mexicans, Mike saw. Far from Sandora. By the wrong border. Coming to the wrong man. He knew the one being helped out of the passenger seat. The one in the tracksuit with the cast around his leg and bandage over nose. Luiz.

Hola, Mikey.

What are you doing here?

Could ask you the same thing, gringo. Este es el pendejo, hermanos.

The driver groaned. His face went queasy. ¿La bastarda que te rompió la pierna?

No, no el cerdo que me rompió la pierna. Este es el tipo que llevó al ciervo a nadar.

Oh. El tipo del bajo de goma.

I asked what you were doing here, Luiz.

Luiz spat, You know why I'm here, Mikey. Hired by the same employers this time. What are *you* doing here? Could have had it by now, you know that?

Mike smiled, I don't know what you're talking about.

Yea, you do. It's down there, right? I'm guessing the lone cabin in the back. Place used to be abandoned up until today so that's my guess.

Why don't you leave, Luiz? Keep that face of yours pretty a little longer.

No, Mikey. I don't think we'll be leaving. It's business down there. But up here it's personal.

Mike tilted his head, ¿Cómo me encontraste?

El motel, idiota. ¿Crees que hay algún motel en este pueblo al que no voy con mis primos?

That would have been racist of me to assume.

But not wrong.

More light fell on Mike. This time from the other direction. Rounding the corner of the plant arrived a second food truck. From the truck came another four men. Mike understood then he was

facing a serious predicament. He might actually get his suit dirty tonight.

Luiz chuckled before a flash of lightning, Should have stayed in the Dakotas.

The man with the bad leg pulled from his tracksuit a knife. The other men repeated this action.

Mike took from his coat his paddle ball.

Another flash of lightning.

The fuck is that?

Paddle ball. It helps me pass the time when I'm bored. Did you bring tacos on the truck by the way?

You dumb fuck. Pon a este chico en el suelo. Firmaré *mi* nombre.

That night, as Mike dined on tacos in his car, waiting for the van to drive out from the cabin, he thought quite cynically, Luiz was better off hanging out with his truck, peddling his goods from there, rather than *hanging* out in front of it.

Hairy

Soldier Field Parking. Bottom Level.

HAIRY

What choice does man have but to reflect on his life when he is alone? When man or butler be far from the buzz of city life, from the blood of fellow men, what then is there to do but face the reality of what brought him to this loneliness? Perhaps some men are never alone. Be it they seek the embrace of vice and distraction, or find salvation and redemption in the arms of Christ. O yes, it is true, I stand alone in this parking garage, but I am not alone, for I feel myself tormented. By my thoughts. My guilt. What choice do I have now but to reflect on these feelings that undo me so?

Twas no longer than a week ago when the stranger entered my life. A most peculiar proposition from a man who seemed as wicked as he was wise. He gave me that cursed card. A card designed to curse a common enemy we shared, a man I hate most intimately. O what hatred does to us. In handing off that card to the Young Master it was not he I cursed but myself. A week ago, yes. Look what has transpired since. Now I am alone, in the depths of this haunted dungeon, outside an arena of life and comradery.

I speak of the folly of hate but twas not hatred that sealed my fate. It was love that killed me. Love for the Master. Not the Young Master but his father. My true Master. A man of diligence and vigor. A champion of eight virtues. He took me from the Old World and gave me a new life. I owed everything to him and I gave him all I had to give. Now mine is the company of Judas and Cassius.

I served him loyally once. As befitting a man of true greatness. But that son of his! Monster wearing his own face! The Young Master. Frank. A most notable coward, an infinite and endless liar, an hourly promise breaker, the owner of not one good quality. How many Christmases did I forgo so he could pummel me in his video games? How many hours of my life were spent waiting in this car here while he gallivanted through zoos, arcades, the pleasures of life? I bore all these troubles well. But the disrespect he showed his father? To my Master? After all the Master gave to him, for all he did not deserve, why was he born to his father and not me?

I suppose the question was not the stations of which we were born into life. God, help me. Why did you make man so succumbed to temptation? Damn that card that had led me to this pit. Damn myself for being the maker of my own ruin. But what's this? The light at the end of my tunnel? This must be none other than the man the Young Master has tasked me to meet.

Enter Scoundrel

SCOUNDREL

In the name of God who hath no eyes here, who are you?

HAIRY

I am called Hairy.

SCOUNDREL

You are called trouble. I have come to parlay with Hanklin so that we might reach the end of our agreement. Is this rather some disagreement?

HAIRY

I know not your dealings with the Young Master. He has tasked me with collecting the check. I am here.

SCOUNDREL

You are dead if Hanklin doesn't step out of that car.

HAIRY

Hold now. You've begun to frighten me, good sir. I serve no Hanklin. The name you mean is Frank.

SCOUNDREL

You must mean Frank is not here.

HAIRY

He is not.

SCOUNDREL

I have tempered my wrath for long enough. Curse you and this riddle you offer me in place of my reward. I have taken this check for your master, whatever name he shades himself in, but know this, servant. I will not be made a fool of here tonight. I have come for my payment. Do you comprehend the consequence of robbing me? It makes no matter to me whether you do or do not.

HAIRY

I beg your forgiveness, sir. We are reasonable creatures as fashioned by God. Surely you can grant some mercy for my ignorance which I must profess in this matter. I knew something sinister was afoot the moment I arrived before the mouth of this pit. For there were two flashes of

lightning as I entered. A most queer omen to find heat flashes at the advent of winter. Yet I did not falter or turn craven. I have done my duty as I always have and traveled to the bottom of this Tartarus. Believe these words. I have done as I was told. I mean no misdeeds upon you.

SCOUNDREL

No doubt your instructions were given in Greek. A misdeed from your master. Now my patience is at an end. You do not have the payment?

HAIRY

I do not.

SCOUNDREL

Very well. You shall pay with your blood.

The Scoundrel grabs Hairy. They exit.

Woolston Five

"Welcome to McDonalds! Would you like to try our number 1 combo?" Asked the goth girl behind the counter of the McDonald's restaurant Woolston had directed Krake to speed over to. "Detective, you still haven't explained. Why are we here exactly?" Krake asked. "Shh, Krake! Can't you see a *goth*[15] girl is talking to me!" Uh, okay haha." The girl whose name tag read 'Lizzy' was visibly nervous. "Ready to order?" Woolston gulped, "Okay, but I'm not a virgin!" Krake sighed, "Forgive him, he's clearly still drunk." The goth girl didn't respond. "J-just the f-five dollar b-biggie bag," mumbled the still drunk Woolston. "Huh? I didn't hear you, big guy. Speak up," said the goth girl.

"The *big guy* said he wants a five dollar biggie bag. Whatever that even is," Krake groaned. "What about a drink?" Asked the goth girl. "Y-your pee," the drunken Woolston slurred. Krake just rested his eyes, enduring the pain of this McDonalds encounter. "*WHAT*," the goth girl cried out. "Lemonade," Woolston quickly said, "oh and honey mustard for my sauce." The goth girl was visibly uncomfortable and shaking in fear. "Okay. Your total is going to be-" "I LOVE YOU," Woolston shouted. "Y-Your total is gonna be

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[15] Goths are seemingly rare. Taxidermy events generally bring them out.

$18.78. Is that okay?" Asked the goth girl. Woolston smiled, "It's not okay. But I guess I'll pay."

Lizzy the goth girl sighed at Woolston's lame boomer joke, "Credit or debit?" "Debit," said Woolston, swiping his card too early. "Sir, no, hold on just let me-" The girl tried to stop Woolston. "Arrgh what the fuck? It's not taking it. That must mean it's free!" Woolston chuckled. "Sir. Just wait until I process it! Then you can swipe your card!" Cried the goth girl. "WHY DON'T I JUST SWIPE IT THROUGH YOUR TITTIES!?" Woolston roared.

Nigel the McDonald's manager bursted through the doors, "Okay, Wooly. That's enough. Get out of here." "Detective, we should go," Krake said. "But this goth girl and I have great chemistry!" "OUT!" Shouted Nigel. The goth girl began to cry as Woolstom stumbled back, knocking over all the condiments on the counter, "Oh, God! Sheila! You did this to me!" Woolston gathered his footing and fixed his tie, "Oh, right! I remember why we're here! Nigel! We need to see your security footage." Nigel raised his brow, "Our security footage?" Krake looked out the window where the ominous Wells Fargo central bank glowed in the distance, "Oh. I see why we're here."

Woolston was enjoying his lemonade as he surfed through the outside camera footage of the McDonalds. They were in the cluttered office and

Nigel and Krake were on either side of Woolston. The camera Woolston was hyper focused on showed the sidewalk directly in front of the fast food restaurant, the road, the parking lot of Wells Fargo, and, naturally, the dark temple that was Wells Fargo in the distance. “What is it you’re looking for specifically?” Krake asked. “Shh…just watch,” Woolston mumbled.

The fuzzy computer screen sped up, showing snow falling on the Wells Fargo parking lot. A few cars pulled in for the morning. Later a food truck stopped by right in front of the bank and left a few minutes later. A couple young women walk by the window of the McDonalds laughing. The sewer grate[16] in the road seems to rumble, almost like it was being lifted from underneath, but then it settles. A minute later a man in a plaid suit follows in the same direction as the girls. A few minutes after that one of the girls is walking back looking for her friend. Hours go by. Cars leave. Woolston speaks, “Son of a bitch…”

“What is it?” Krake asks, “I didn’t see anything out of the ordinary.” Woolston smiles, “I don’t blame you. It isn’t *exactly* out of the ordinary but once you notice it, well, you might shit bricks, Krake.” “Now I’m dying to know,” Krake says. “Yea, what is it? I didn’t see it either,” Nigel said. Woolston turned in the chair he was sitting in, “Correct me if I’m wrong, fellas, but when you get

[16] I meant “manhole cover”

to work, don't you usually turn your car off? Look on the screen right there. In the morning a fancy car pulls up and a guy gets out in the back. The driver is sitting idle for eight hours. Now that's pretty suspicious." Krake nods, "Good job, detective, I didn't even notice. That *is* rather suspicious. How did you get the idea to look for that?" Woolston takes a sip of lemonade, "A gut feeling. Remember when we first stopped by Wells Fargo? I noticed a dark spot in the parking lot. Like a muffler had been melting snow in the same spot for a day. Crazy thing is, I didn't notice at the time, that car was in another spot, doing it again," Woolston pointed at the screen. The screen showed Woolston and Krake entering Wells Fargo while the fancy car sat idle in the parking lot.

Since Woolston's radio was currently misplaced,[17] he used Krake's personal radio to call directly over to the station from the McDonalds office, "Hello," Woolston said, "is this Angels?" "No, this is Sophia." "Where's that lazy asshole Angels?" Woolston asked. "Sleeping? Detective, it's almost four in the morning," the voice at the other end said. "Where does the time go," Woolston chuckled. "Listen, Sophia, I, uh, need you to run a plate for us real quick," Woolston said, zooming in on the fancy car as it passed by the McDonalds at the end of the day. "I'm ready, detective." "Alright, Illinois plate. B.R.N.2.S.R.V."

[17] At the bottom of Lake Michigan

“That’s an easy one. One moment…got it right here. It’s registered to…oh. This is belongs to-”

Woolston was astonished, “I am astonished. Krake…” “I know. That’s the man behind the mayor. I am aware of how this may compromise the force.” Woolston shook his head, “Could this go deeper than Wells Fargo? The mayor? M-” Krake fixed his tie, “Detective, wherever this case may lead, we have a duty to uphold the law and bring criminals to justice. We have new leads now.” “The man who was getting out of that car, going inside for eight hours, that wasn’t Mr. Big Time. Kind of looks like him but not as old.”

“Frank?” Everyone turned around to see the goth girl Lizzy standing at the door. “My roommate works across the street at Wells Fargo. She mentioned to me she met a new hire named Frank there. She said he pulls up in a car that doesn’t leave, said it freaked her out at first. She’s uh…she went out with him tonight.” Woolston and Krake gave each other uncertain looks.

“The address, Sophia! Just give us the address!” Woolston cried as Krake sped off into the night. “Just a moment, just…okay, you’re heading for 1 Burling Street.”[18] “You’re a credit to your race, *fuck*!” Woolston slammed the radio down while Krake looked over, “*What?*” “It’s my gut feeling, Krake. My hunch too. My detective radar, as it were. I feel like it’s all coming together,

[18] They shit gold on Burling Street

that we're on the right track. I mean, this Frank guy. We know *who* his father is. Yet a guy like him needs a job? He starts, what, earlier this week? *Then* there's the missing forty grand?" Krake shrugs as he cuts through the city like a mean piece of butter, "It's only conjecture so far but these are irregularities, yes." "Another thing my gut is telling me. *Hanklin*. What's that name kind of sound like?" Krake just gave a worried look and drove on.

They pulled up before the gated mansion. They bided their time. Fortunately, it wasn't a long wait before the beige jacketed Frank strolled up. Woolston led Krake across the road and from Frank's shadow they introduced themselves.

"Hello, Frank."

"O-Officers," Frank stuttered, "w-what are you, I-I mean, what can I do for you?" Woolston rested his hand on Frank's shoulder, "Oh just talking with us would be nice. I was really worried you might not be home but looks we can do our talking right now, eh? I'm Detective Woolston and this…" Woolston gave a curious look to Krake then. "This is my trusty partner, Inspector Krake." "We won't take up much of your time," Krake said. He looked like he had just seen a child get eaten alive at an amusement park, "Sure. Right. Uh…" Frank trailed off and Woolston smiled, "You want to invite us inside? It's a little cold out here, buddy." Frank frowned but he complied.

Woolston was amazed by the inside of Frank's home. Woolston wasn't sure what the floor of the foyer was made of. Wood? Marble? It was expensive as shit, no doubt. Funny pattern too. Streaks like a watermelon though the calls around him were all a rotten brown. There were stairs leading up. Stairs leading down what looked like a private club. A grand dining hall to his right and a portrait depicting a muscle bound, oily skinned Frank wrestling a crocodile into submission. As much as it made Woolston feel like a faggot for thinking, he felt like he had entered Hogwarts.[19]

"This is a very nice home, Frank," Woolston said. The whole place seemed to sparkle but he noticed a certain dull tinge to the painting of Frank. Woolston wiped his finger across it and found it was surprisingly dusty. "Ah, thank you. Oh, and my Daddy had that painted for my 25th birthday ha-ha." "Your father is an important man, Frank. May we sit?"

Sitting in the parlor, which was down the stairs and in a room that had windows out to the built-in pool, which gave an aquatic ambience to the room, Woolston could see Frank was sweating. "I heard you got a new job, Frank. Where would that be?" Frank tugged at his collar, "Ah, um. Wells Fargo, actually. I was told I'd make an excellent asset there ha-ha." Woolston smiled, "They approached you for the job?" "Um, sort of,

[19] I played Hogwarts Legacy and thought it was cool so that's what this room is like.

ha-ha. No." "How'd you find out they were hiring?" "My butler." Woolston took out his notepad, "The butler, huh? He drives you to work?" "He does." "You liking the job?" "It's okay." Woolston could see there was already a great deal of pressure on Frank. Like Frank was ready to explode into a firework of diarrhea. But he wasn't cracking just yet. He wasn't *shitting* himself just yet.

"Why Wells Fargo?" Woolston asked. "My butler-" "You mentioned the butler. But *why* work there?" "We would like to know why you chose employment there," Krake interjected, "it struck as odd you would need a job suddenly in the middle of November." "Because my Daddy insisted I get a job," Frank said, facing turning red, despite the blue hue of the room.

Woolston jotted down his notes. He had got Frank answering questions so far. He figured it was time to crack him open while he was still talking. He just needed to get his hook set in there. "You got the job to make daddy proud then?" Frank was sweaty looking. For a moment there was a scowl to his face. Then he blinked and said, "I told you. Daddy *insisted* I get a job." Woolston nodded. Slowly. "You didn't want the job?" Frank just shook his head. I'm in, Woolston thought.

Now it was time to draw the hook. "Frank," Woolston began with some hoarseness to his voice for dramatic effect, "you strike me as an honest fellow and I believe you've been honest with me

so I think it's only fair I'm honest with you. I think about Kröd Mändoon and the Flaming Sword of Fire a lot." "*What*?" Frank asked. Krake cleared his throat, "I believe my partner meant to refer to a matter relating to Wells Fargo." Fucking liquor, Woolston cursed internally as he slapped his face a couple times, to the obvious stress of the suspect sitting before him, "Yes. Yes, that's it. Frank! We know about the forty grand."

"F-forty?" Frank stammered, eyes widened, "I-I'm on thirty ha-ha." "Frank," Woolston said, his serious tone fully returned, "we already know. We're just trying to get all the details straightened out now." Frank was sweating bullets then, "I-I don't know what you're talking about. D-Did you know I was an author? I-I've written books, I can tell you about those!" Woolston let out a heavy breath, "Frank, if you don't give us your side of the story, help us figure out the facts, this case will come back to the station, and it's not going to look good if you didn't talk. We know you just got hired there and that's when the forty grand went missing. Just a phantom forty thousand dollars outside of the bank's control. Hard to believe such a thing would happen. Unless maybe you tell me what happened. See, to me, it sounds like some kind of mistake happened. Did you make some kind of mistake, Frank?"

"I don't make mistakes," Frank said softly, but Woolston heard the hate in his voice. Krake heard something else and craned his head back, "I

think I just heard a car pull up." "Your father? Or maybe your butler?" Woolston asked. Frank jumped up, "My Daddy, yes! I'm afraid I have to kick you two out now ha-ha! Sorry, but my Daddy said no guests allowed. You'll have to take the side door out and cut through the front." Woolston stood, "I'm not done here, Frank." "*You are*," Frank insisted. "Frank. There's a man, I am convinced, hunting you right now. Sent by your employers to get their money back. A maniac by the name of Mike is very likely on his way here already if my partner and I figured out your involvement. We're talking about a very bad and very dangerous person who you don't want to meet, Frank. Why don't you come back to the station with us and we'll talk some more there."

"I feel very safe in my own home, thanks," Frank said.

Z

Every hero has to have their great low point, am I right? That's about where I'm at right now. Me? You can call me Z. Last letter of the alphabet, baby. The best for friggin last. That's how I've always rolled and I've always rolled out on top. But tonight? Fuck me, I ain't feeling good about tonight. Let's wind the clock back, let's say, an hour ago. Just beat the shit out of this well dressed guy. Says he's a butler or something. The thing is. I met him where I was supposed to meet the guy who was supposed to cough up eight grand in return for a piece of *mismanaged corporate property* we'll say. I still got that check on me. I don't got the eight grand. The butler though? Well, he's in the trunk of his own car.

I drove that swanky car up to the nice side of town. Right where the butler said he works. Imagine that! Having a God damned butler. I've been doing odd jobs since I was six and that shit don't come with no 401k. Nah, nah, nah. This guy. Hanklin. Well that's not even his name. I mean, sure, I get it, I call myself Z. But the dude's real name is Frank and he's only the son of one of the richest motherfuckers in the city. Yea. Eight grand ain't gonna cut it. You know what? I had a fucking heart attack in that parking lot. I thought I was gonna get set up or some shit. I mean, where was

Frank? Whose this butler guy? Yea. It's time to collect.

There's this feeling too. Like I'm being watched. Big bad wolf on my tracks or something. The cops? Can't shake the feeling. I reach king fuck's castle, bigger than I expected, and I expected big. What do I find? *Cops!* Two of them just snuck out of the house. Man, it's a good thing I pulled and backed out to collect my thoughts. I don't know if I mentioned this, or if I getting this across, but I'm kind of on fucking edge over here. Man, I'm out right fucking pissed! Idiot 1 tried to screw me over as far as I can tell! Who sends a guy to an exchange without EXCHANGING? Idiot 2 doesn't have a clue. That's why he's in the trunk. Cops? Assholes 3 & 4 in my book. Assholes 1 & 2 are back at the hideout, waiting to give me shit. No. I ain't taking any more of their God damn shit. I'm checking out.

Damn did I make the right call taking the butler-mobile. There's a switch and the gate opens. I wait until the pigs fly and then I'm in. Bet Frank doesn't expect me coming. Better be quick about this.

Nah. I'm gonna savor this actually. Got let loose some of this fucking anger. I step out of the car. Boot to the ground. Feels good. Fix my hair real quick in the reflection of the car. Son of a bitch do I got that Ryan Gosling look in the right light. Where was I? Oh yea, time to rape Frank.

I kick open the door like the badass I am, “Ring, ring!” There’s the shit little shit walking up the stairs from what looks like a far nicer bar than the Pig Pen. “Hey, asshole! Remember me!?”

The little rat shrieks like a banshee, “Aieee! Don’t hurt me!”

Scooping up the million dollar looking vase I hurl it at Frank. I don’t know where I’m aiming per se but it shatters above the door frame and rains glass down over Frank. Fuck, I feel better already. But I got more steam to blow off, “The money, motherfucker.” Hang on, I can do better than that, “Rent just went up.” I reached into my jacket and lit a match off my sick boot. “You owe me, Frank. You tried to fuck me and you owe me for that.”

Little shit was waving his hands up from the stairway. God, I knew I’d have it out for this guy the second I saw him. Even back when he said he thought our bar meeting was at 9:00 and that Jason told us 8:00. I had actually just read the message wrong but I say that was fate pitting me against this loser. “Okay, okay!” He cried, “I know, I-I just, I couldn’t make it tonight, so I sent my butler and I-”

“Your butler’s in the trunk.”

“Okay. But you got the check, right?”

Slimy little shit. I throw the match at that obnoxious painting of him on the wall. Thing lights up like a Christmas tree. What do you know? That smoked Frank out from his door. He runs up

to the painting, throws it from the wall. Paintings on the ground, a smoking ruin, looks like he doesn't know what he's supposed to do next with the way he's jumping up and down in a panic. Here. I'll help.

I throw Frank against the wall to show him I really mean business, "Like I said. Rent's gone up. You're gonna owe more than eight grand for the check."

"I'll pay! I'll pay! But, I uh, I don't have any money right now-" He was asking for the knife. I showed it to him. "My family has a lot of jewelry though! I'll show you! Please, don't hurt me!"

Honestly, I felt like a kid in a candy shop. A candy factory. Wonka's Wonderland and I knew I wasn't winning the entire place. Part of me was amazed when I saw his little exhibit. But seeing it pissed me right off again. It took a minute to actually find a trash can like in a normal human house. Found one around the corner and threw everything around on the floor. My shopping spree had begun.

"I'm taking this. Taking that. Some of these. This too, asshole," I shouted, filling the bag with gold rings, necklaces, jewells and who knows what else. As long as it sparkled, it was mine! Everything I've dealt with. Og. Frank. Life! I had been waiting for this pay off my whole friggin life.

"Hnnnoooo," I heard Frank moan, weeping in the corner. Bastard. Shouldn't have reminded

me he was even here. I was so caught up in the fun, the splendor.

"Get over here you little weasel," I tossed him to the floor just because I could. "What were the police doing here? What were you saying?" He didn't answer quickly enough through his stuttering, "Answer me!"

"N-nothing! I swear I told them nothing!"

They were onto this idiot. I had taken everything that could be melted down into precious metals that I could see in the room. It was time to get out of Dodge. "Alrighty, *Frank*. I think we're done here."

"The check!" Frank shouted. I was surprised he found his balls then. "Jason said you were reliable! You got your pay so where's your end of the bargain?"

I also had a smidge of respect until I realized he was just too dense to understand I could stick him with my knife, "Jason? The guy's my fucking weed dealer. The hell do I care about his word?" Wait, there's a joke here I bet. "Think his word is gold? Bitch! I got the gold!" I waved the bag in front of Frank's face. Ooh I was feeling high!

"Where's the check!?" The twat shouted at me.

A part of me wanted to stick him then. But nah. No way. I'd stuck a guy once before. Felt bad about it too. It's a push goes to shove sort of thing and he wasn't really pushing by whining. Besides. Now that I knew who his father was, it suddenly

hit me I was pushing my luck being here as it was. Let nobody say Z is a dishonorable guy, you here?

"Here," I threw the check out from my pocket, "take your fucking check." It was almost sad seeing him grovel and claw at it. Whatever. Job was done. Now it was time to tie up a few loose ends. Another good move on my part as I left. Wanted to spit on the floor. Nah. Too much of my germs around as it was. If Frank was smart, and this was a pretty big if, he'd keep this shit behind closed doors. But I'm not a guy who takes big chances like that. Cops might be back. Loose ends now and then I'm cashing out of this state.

Outside I tossed the butler out of the trunk and let him lay out in the driveway. I drove off with my spoils back to Soldier Field. Leave their car there. Take Og's van. Figure Og will want that back and the four thousand cash I scrounge up back at my place. He doesn't need to know about the gold. Fuck Og. We ain't married.

Sunrise hit. I strolled into Og's shit shack feeling like hot shit. I hid the gold in my fish tank. Genius level stuff. Had to flush the fish, sure, but well worth the, fuck, I don't know, hundred grand? Anyways, under that mulay was blue pebble. Ain't ever anyone finding that haul.

"Where's the broad?" I asked Og who was still being a couch potato in front of the TV.

"Basement," Og said, like the psycho fuck he was.

“Thanks for the answer.” When I left, Ari had been tied up in the kitchen. Not the best idea in hindsight since there were knives in there. But hey! The basement? We can’t see what’s going on down there. Motherfucker has a basement with like four rooms down there. Psycho bastard family. “Here, your fucking cut.” I laid out two thousand in cash on the table next to Og.

“I get four thousand,” the great oaf groaned. Knew he’d make a fuss about it. Truth was I only had two grand in cash to my name. Okay, twenty-two hundred. But what, am I supposed to say Frank tipped us? No. I ain’t cashing out that gold for his sake either. I got two hundred dollars to my name before I ditch with the gold. It was easier to say, “Frank went back on his word. He only gave us four grand. Knew I shouldn’t have trusted that fucker but job’s done.”

I was ready to leave it there too. But then he ran his mouth, “Give me your cut.”

“Excuse me, asshole?” I turned back.

Og wasn’t even looking away from the TV. Lady on the screen was showing off her legs, “If it’s Labuschagne then it *has* to be good.”

With his dumb, grunt voice he said, “Give me your cut. I go visit Hanklin myself. Get you your cut later.”

I didn’t have the collateral he wanted, “You got stones in your ears? It’s done, Og. That wasn’t bad work for what it was. We got two grand to our names here. Hanklin- excuse me, *Frank*, has paid

us our shares. Are we clear? Are we even stevens?" Pig fuck still wasn't looking at me, "I said, are we *even stevens*?" Not even a glance. Fuck this guy. "Just take your money and watch your fucking TV. I'm going out for a drink."

At long fucking last I had come to smooth sailing. Easy street. The promised land. All I had to do was swing that door back open. Fuck me, had I seen that axe taking to the back of my head.

Frank Seven

Maybe things weren't going so smoothly after all. It was a heart attack to see the police show up outside of his house, Frank thinks, as he paces back and forth in his mansion. Knowing that the police were on to him was not good. Even having the check back in his sweaty hands, didn't seem to make him feel all that much better.

"Finally having this check back in my hands doesn't make me feel all that better" Frank says. Under the circumstances, he thought he should be happy. Not that he was upset to have the check, mind you. Somehow, having a maniac rush into your house and take your family jewelry as payment for said check, turned out to be a rather bad mood spoiler.

Unconventional as it was to get the check back, Frank figured he should get a hold of himself. Not one to dwell on the past, Frank forced a smile. "Really, this is good, I'm glad I got this check back ha-ha, it was worth it, it was worth it." Errors had been made before, surely, so why was it a big deal Frank made a $40,000 error his first day anway? "And they'll never find out I made such a big oopsy" Frank says aloud, smugly. Life seemed to once again be back under control, until the phone rang.

Trembling, Frank's hand picks up the ivory phone hung on the wall, "Hello?" He asks. It was

very late to be receiving a phone call, Frank thinks. In fact, it was so late it was technically very early in the morning to be receiving a phone call. This made Frank feel worried. Who was calling? Who was calling Frank? A dry voice answered “I see the check has made it home safely.” Frank’s heart nearly played hooky on the school that was his prime thirty year old body. This was a voice he had never heard before but how, Frank wonders, did they know about the check making it back to him? “Who is this?” There was a static pause over the line “You know who this is, Frank.” Frank nearly gasped. Whoever it was, they knew, his name, too. “Why are you calling?” “I thought it was about time you and I talked.” Frank knew who was calling then. “I was told about you. You’re Mike, aren’t you?” Frank asks, though he is mostly certain. “I told you you would know who I am.”

Frank wipes the sweat from his forehead. First Woolston and Krake, then Z, and this Mike character was calling to give him trouble. The check was returned with a lot of problems, Frank realizes “The police told me about you, Mike.” Frank says. “You consider this an advantage?” Frank thinks about it “Yea, I’d say so.” Frank says, feeling cocky. “They mustn’t have said much if you didn’t agree to go into custody with them.” Mike says. “The hell do you want?” Frank already knew what Mike wanted, but he wasn’t sure why Mike was calling. “I am the collector. I am here to collect what you owe the bank. I waited to see

exactly where this check was going to end up. I was very curious to find out it was you, Frank. But we don't have to meet. Your role in this story can end if you go outside and leave that check in the mailbox."

Frank sighs "I'm not doing that. This was *my* mistake and *I'm* fixing it myself." Franks says, defiantly. "There are some people in this world you do not want to meet. Do you want to meet me, Frank? If you don't step out of your house, put that check in the mailbox in the next minute, I'll introduce myself to you." Mike says. "Fat chance, Mike! Nobody makes me, Frank, look like an idiot, but me, Frank!" Frank said before thinking about what he said "Besides, the check is going back to Wells Fargo either way. But I'm not going to have myself looking bad because YOU want to play errand boy. Where even are you anyways?" A pause followed. "Why, Frank, I'm already in the house." The line was hooked.

Frank's, heart, walked dinosaurs. With terror, Frank spins around to see the golden handle turn. Acting quickly, Frank skipped forward and pushed the Italian import furniture in front of the door just as it was about to open. "Oh God" Frank thinks, heart pounding like an undercover pedo on prom night "this maniac is in my house!" The door was being rammed from the other side but Frank ran through the other door, in the room, before the couch could be pushed away. "Goodness gracious" Frank thinks in terror "that phone call! Why did I

answer!? Why did I answer the Call of Wells Fargo!?"

In the next room Frank reinforced *that* door with the French cabinet. Then the room after *that* with the Russian stuffed bear his father got from Arizona. "Holy moly, this is just like that game Outlast I played but couldn't beat because it was too scary" said Frank, and it was true. In the waiting lounge before Daddy Dearest's office, Frank found none other than Hairy the Butler, crawling with a light blood trail from the way he had come.

"Hairy, thank God!" Frank says "I need you get up and drive me far away from here! There's a madman in the house!" Hairy tried to sit himself up but flopped back to the ground a bloody mess "Owwghh, the scoundrel? He's still here? Ooww…Young Master, my legs…" Frank skipped over and looked down at Hairy like a child inspected a retarded bug "Hairy! This is no time for fooling around! The maniac is somewhere in the house and he's coming for me! You need to get up and drive me away!"

Hairy spat some blood with one of his teeth mixed into it "Aww, yes, Young Master, I should love to get us out of here, but my legs…" Frank crouched down "Are your legs asleep?" Frank asked as he went to pick up Hairy's limp leg by the ankle. A distinct cracking sound could be heard as Frank lifted and Hairy said "AAAAHHHHHhhhh!" "Hairy! What are you

doing!? You're going to give us away!" "My leg" Hairy cries "Aah-hhaaa, Young Master, it is most definitely broken!" Frank looks around in a panic "Okay, I *guess* you are pretty hurt then."

In agony, Hairy leans back, limp wristed hand held in the air "The scoundrel beat me senselessly. My face, it is burned from when he held my head to the muffler of the car. Ooh the pain is so great, I need to go to the hospital, yes" Frank nods "Stop being whiny, Hairy! Just sit tight, I'll get you something for your wounds, and then you can drive me to safety!"

Frank dashes up into his father's office. From under the self built desk was the self built mini fridge. Inside was Frank's father's self made ice. He took that and went to the first aid kit in the drawer and took out some hydrogen peroxide "This oughta do the trick" Frank thinks as he goes to return to the overreacting Hairy.

"Young Master, is that you? My, uggh, my vision grows blurry…did you bring something for my wounds?" Hairy asks, feebly, unlike how butlers should be. "Yes!" Frank says "I brought ice for those burns on your face!" "What- AAR RGGHHHH!!" Hairy cries as Frank applies ice to Hairy's burned up face "Quit your whining already, Hairy! Those burns look hot just to the touch so ice will help cool them down" Frank advised but the ungrateful Hairy instead said "AHOOGHH HOHOOghhh! RNNNNGG!! AAaaAAA PLEASE!"

Holding the ice in place, Frank popped off the cap of the hydrogen peroxide “Here! Medicine to make you feel better, Hairy!” “Huh-” Frank tilts what he considered the real life equivalent of a video game health potion, directly down Hairy’s throat, pouring half its contents into the butler “Shhh! Drink it, Hairy. Drink it and get us out of here!” “*BLEAAGHHHHH*!” Hairy vomits, rudely. “You’re not helping! Stop being so lazy, gosh darn it” Frank curses, kicking Hairy on the ground.

The door knob from the way Frank had come turned with an audible twist. Frank gasped, knowing Mike had come. “Damn it, Hairy! I’ll tell Daddy you were slacking!” Frank leaves Hairy to his own fate and runs into the main foyer of the mansion. He jumps over the ashy remains of the portrait and walks up to the door and begins to take a breath in order to pump himself up “Okay! I’ve never driven a car before but I guess there’s no choice but to drive Hairy’s car myself! I better pump myself up first ha-ha” Frank does a few jumping jacks and yells out “Let’s Yabba Dabba Fucking-Do-This!” He kicks the front doors open but his eyes widen in horror, like a polar bear reading up on global warming “HUH!? Where’s the car!?” Wherever it was, it wasn’t, here!

A door opens but not from where Frank came. From one of the balconies above close to the ceiling of the foyer, was Mike. Dark suited and gold of hair. Frank felt a tinge of super fear as his shark eyes met the eyes of his predator X. This was

Mike, Frank realized. Though, Frank, was scared, he reached into his jacket and waved the check "Try and stop me, Mike!" Mike, answers by dropping down from the balcony, and landing on the ground with grace. Frank, not expecting Mike could do this, cries out "d'oh shit" and runs out the door, no car to his name.

Puzzled by Mike's miraculous ability to land a story down, and terrified by the fact that man was after him and the precious check he needed to turn back over, a baffled Frank takes to the streets, completely committed to his goal of not making a jackass of himself. "It's 5 in the morning" Frank thinks as he scurries down the road "how terrible! I should just be getting in bed right about now!"

Frank wasn't used to seeing the city at 5am. Heck, he wasn't used to seeing the city very much as it stood. "5am in the city" he thinks and he huffs as he runs through a narrow brick alleyway between two large houses "I've never been up this early before. I wonder if this is when the gnomes are still out drinking!" But no gnomes were found before Frank's frantic eyes. Frank knew in his heart of cards, there was no time to be thinking about gnomes, when a maniac was chasing after you. He mario hopped a parked car and found himself crashing down on a cart of watermelons. "My watermelons" cried the watermelon man as watermelons rolled and splattered into the street, causing cars to spin out of control. But poor Frank

had no time for that! There was $40,000 to deposit!

Entering the nice part of the city where gaslights lit the streets, Frank skids down the corner and sees two police officers outside of their paddy wagon, eating floffle wops. “Officers! Officers, here! Please you have to help me” Frank cries as he runs up to the cops “I’m being chased by a maniac!” Frank says, but as he points back to the way he came, none other than Rhyme from the interview came walking out of the hotel down the road “Oh! So you think you can go around chasing law abiding citizens, eh?” One officer said, throwing the floffle over his shoulder “Not in MY city” said the other officer. The two officers approach Rhyme “Ah, hello officers, I was just about to alert you that a woman is having some type of medical episode inside the hotel. I believe an ambulance has already been-” The officers began to beat Rhyme down to the ground with their night sticks “We’ll call TWO ambulances” “Maybe a hearse, you sick bastard” yelled the officers. As they were busy administering the law, Mike ran up beside them, fixed his tie, and spotted Frank. Frank gulps and the chase resumes.

An older woman was walking her little papillon dog. Legs up to his knees, Frank ran up and down the road toward the woman, failing to notice Frank, until he had snatched up the dog “Hey! You hooligan what are you-” “Hyah!” Frank hurled the dog toward Mike. Mike dodged it

matrix style, looking cool while doing it, and Frank, taken aback, was back to running. This time right down the stairs to the local subway transportation system “A sub! I need to get on a sub and lose this guy!” Frank thinks “Dratz! If only I was poor, I’d know how the hell to use a subway.”

The subway seemed spooky and empty to Frank, but the first terminals were completely deprived of subs “Where are the subs!?” Continuing on, Frank then runs by a homeless man pissing on the bare floor “Woah!” Frank urine slides in place, all the way past a duo of graffiti artists painting out the message: *Be sure to leave a review!* Sliding into a subway restaurant, within the subway station itself, the two sub twinks manning the counter (formerly each other) break from one another and say to Frank “Welcome to subway, what can we get you today?” As Frank was still sliding by across them, he says “Just a Pepsi please! I’m in a rush!” They quickly pour Frank a Pepsi and hand him his drink “That’ll be $2.99.” Frank takes the drink and frowns “Sorry, I only have a check for forty grand!” Frank yells as he exits the subway, still on his slide, now taking a drink of his Pepsi.

Returning to his running outside the restaurant, Frank hears a whiny “Hey! Get back here and pay! *Both* of you!” Looking back, Frank sees Mike sliding out of the subway with his own Pepsi in hand and straw in mouth. Panicking,

Frank begins to suck off his Pepsi more urgently as he runs off in desperate search of a sub to hop. Finally, he sees one over at terminal 13. “Boy howdy, my ticket out of here!” Frank thinks as he charges into the doors of the closing cart in a nick of time. Looking back he sees Mike arrive a second to late at the closed door. Frank chuckles “Ha-ha, wooh! I always knew I was a sly fox” Frank says as he takes a victorious sip of Pepsi.

Looking around, Frank sees the congregation of lower middle class people either getting home from their nightly grind, or ready to go through the meat grinder in the coming hour. “Boy this place sure smells funny” Frank says, throwing the Pepsi over his shoulder, splashing several people sitting behind him. “Motherfuck” shouts a man. Frank turns around “Oh sorry ha-ha, I didn’t mean to-” Frank sees the door from the back of the cart open. His eyes glare and he sees man on the mission Mike shoving his way forward. Frank’s heart fearjaculates in his chest “This guys a terminator!” He thinks before running off to the end of the cart. A blonde woman carrying a pizza steps in front of Frank “Out of my way” Frank cries, pushing the woman back. The woman hits her head off the metal pole and falls into her seat unconscious, pizza left to spill on the floor. “Ooh!” Frank takes one slice of pizza before moving onto the next cart.

Frank chows down on the pizza as fast as he can, as he runs and crosses the carts of the train,

making his way to the very back of it. Looking back to check on Mike, he sees Mike finishing his own slice of pizza before taking a sip of Pepsi "Damn! I should have held onto my Pepsi longer" Frank thinks, with regret.

At last, Frank reaches the last cart of the train. He sees three burly men, with big beards, looking like they either came from a construction site or a gay orgy, either way, Frank could smell the sweat in the air. "I'm not sure if they're gay or construction workers, but I need their help!" Frank took his chance as Mike entered the cart. Frank points to Mike and yells "That guy is a pedophile! He looks at naked children! I saw it!" At once the big bearded men stand up "You sick fuck" shouts one of the bearded men. Frank takes a sigh of relief "Phew, so they are construction workers."

But Frank has little time for relief. He looks back over and sees the way to him cleared as the center man fell on his back, while a rubber band bounced off of his forehead. The second man tries to lunge at Mike but Mike uses his cat-like cat reflexes to dodge and whip out his scotch tape. Mike tapes the thrown fist to the metal pole and the man slips, pulling his taped arm out of place. The third bearded man kicks Mike, but Mike takes the kick like a champ, and literally as well. Mike takes out his stapler and staples three staples into the man's like "Awh! Fuck!" Disoriented, the man staggers to the side. Mike then quickly staples his eyelids shut "My eyes! Oh fuck! My eyes!" The

man frantically runs into a pole, and knocks himself out. Looking away from his work, Mike returns his sights on Frank.

"Sweet Christmas!" Frank cries before running to the back end door of the cart. He gulps as he looks down, at the tracks the train was speeding over. Left with no other options, Frank jumps from the train, hopes for the best, and rolls through the dust for a moment. His eyes spinning, he sits up and takes a hold of his head, allowing his vision to stabilize. Frank watches the train speed off "Wooh! Finally, I'm off the train!" He then sees Mike land with relative ease off the train "Oh, right. Mike." Frank jumps to his feet and begins to run down the spooky and dark subway tunnel.

Feasibly there is an awesome shot of Mike chasing Frank down this scary tunnel with the shot being rotated upside down once they pass creating the illusion of the chase occurring on the very ceiling of the tunnel. "Okay, from what I remember seeing back at the station, I do believe terminal 13's train was heading right for the area the Wells Fargo bank is" Frank thinks "If I keep going I'll be able to get this check back and smooth all my worries away WITHOUT looking like I misplaced multiple thousands of dollars. I bet they'll make me manager for seeing how reliable I am with mishaps like this!"

The tunnel begins to curve and Frank loses sight of Mike. Instead of the maniac in the suit, he glances to his side and sees a large crack in the

wall, big enough for him to squeeze into, which he promptly does. Tucked away in the crack, he watches the clueless Mike speed by, and practically giggles over how sly he is “Holy Toledo! I’m getting away” Frank thinks as he shimmies a little further back into the crack. He goes back too far and falls backwards into a secret room. “Oof! Huh? What’s this? A secret room?”

The room produced a very gentle sound of running water, coming from the various pipes leaking into the pool of crystal water, glittering with light from the surface via the sewgrate above. There was a sleeping bag to the side and various wrappers creating the scene of a spilled trash can “Wait, is…someone living here?” Sitting up from where he landed, Frank looks around more and sees, from another crack in the secret, underground woom, the light reflection on two dark eyes, “Aiee!” Frank crab walks into the corner as he spots the monster, “Don’t eat me!”

Reluctantly, a figure forms in the shadow of the crack, and takes a step out into the light “D-don’t worry. I-I won’t eat you or anything.” Stepping into the light, Frank sees what looks like a vampire. But instead of a vampire, he sees a girl with pale skin, short white hair, all black eyes, and two buck teeth, though the teeth arguably are rather fangish looking. “W-what are you?” Frank stutters. The girl scratches at her pointy ears as she crouches to be low to the ground “Um, a girl. I guess. Rat Girl, yes, that’s what they called me”

Rat Girl says. “Are you a vampire?” Frank asks. Rat Girl chuckles “Hehe, no. Just very ugly. Why were you running like that just now? I was eating some crumbs out of a fritos bag when I heard the commotion” Rat Girl says. “Let’s just say I’m late for work.”

Rat Girl perks her head up “Work? Oh no, you don’t work in this area do you?” Frank gets suspicious at this remark “Huh? Why? Is there something wrong with the area we’re in?” Rat Girl scurries over across the room to where a series of maps and notes are posted on the wall “Yes! I’ve been doing my best to keep track from down here! This area, people don’t understand. They talk of monsters roaming the surface. They think it’s me whenever they sneak a glance of me on my prowls but I’m no monster, I just like to eat crumbs. What they don’t know is that girls have been going missing here. I do my best to stay on the lookout but whatever is happening I can never quite pinpoint. I’m afraid there’s-”

“Homp! Hrrmmpf, *mmmf*!” Frank stretches his arms “Golly, I should really be asleep right now. Hey, Rat Girl. Do you know how far it is to the Wells Fargo bank?” A look of doom spells across Rat Girl’s ugly face “Wuh? W-Wells Fargo? It’s just outside my den here. But that’s where all the girls are-” Frank jumps to his feet “Great Googily Moogily, I’ve made it!” Frank runs up to the exit in the ceiling. He climbs the table by the wall of papers Rat Girl has compiled “Thanks for

the directions, Rat Girl!" "W-wait, I have a ladder, don't just-" Rat Girl says but Frank wastes no time, stepping his feet off of the papers on the wall as he climbs up to the sewer grate "I'm off Rat Girl! Oh, by the way. You should really spend some money and get your face fixed up so it won't be so ugly ha-ha" Frank suggests as the maps and papers collapse and float into the water of the underground pool.

Climbing up to the surface, Frank sees the monolith of modern might: Wells Fargo. He smiles as he races for the front doors as the first suggestions of sunrise bleed into the sky, perhaps just an hour away from dawn. "I did it! I made it to Wells Fargo! Nothing can stop me now!" Frank says aloud before he is slung back from an invisible first "What!? Ghosts!?" Frank stands up and sees the scotch tape stuck to his tummy. He sees there was a subtle barrier of tape lined up between two parked cars. Frank gasps as Mike steps up from behind him.

"No!" Frank cries. He drops to his knees and begins to crawl for Wells Fargo like an infant. Mike grabs Frank by the ankle and whips to the side of one of the cars. Slowly, Mike puts his hand toward Frank's face. Frank shuts his eyes tightly, expecting the worst. But no pain comes to him. Instead, he opens his eyes and sees Mike pulling the check out from his jacket. Standing up straight, Mike puts the check into his own coat pocket and sighs "What's there to do with you, Frank?" Mike

looks around while a stunned Frank waits for whatever is going to happen next. After a moment, Mike leans toward Frank with his fist out. He shakes his fist twice in the air before adding "Ready? One. Two-"

Woolston Six

"At least we know he was here," Krake said, holding his coffee, as he and Detective Woolston stood outside the Unreal 8 Motel. It was early morning, the sky still grey from the prior night. Woolston looked to the sun bank. A message written in yellow. It read in deep, yellowed crevices: Mike was here.[20]

"That fucker is pissing on us," Woolston slugged back his coffee and grunted. "Hrm! I'm gonna shit on his message!" Krake put his hand on Woolston's shoulder. "Detective, no." Krake lets out a heavy breath, mist spews into the air, "How are you feeling by the way?" Woolston shrugs at the question, "Like crap, Krake, like crap. I'm not even at the hangover. Still got the buzz. Ugh, and don't even ask if I got any sleep in the last few hours since we split." Krake nods, "Yes, I didn't get much sleep myself. An hour maybe. But this new lead could be promising." Woolston sips the last of his coffee and looks the Unreal 8 up and down, "When I got the call I thought Frank might have changed his mind and wanted to come clean. Oh well, let's get to it."

"Oowie zoowie," Woolston found himself saying upon entering the motel and seeing the cute tomboy behind the counter. Krake only sighs.

[20] Yes, he even got the period.

“Relax, Krake. I can handle this.” Woolston strolls up to the tomboy and leans against the counter, “Excuse me, sir, but, aw fuck.” Krake adjusts his tie, “We were told you were the one who reported some suspicious activity here last night.” The tomboy nods, “Yea, lot of weirdos lately. I mean, we get weirdos all the time, it’s a motel after all. But when they come one right after another looking around and not actually taking a room. Well, I figured something might be going down.” “Who came by exactly?” Woolston asked. The tomboy shrugs, “Just last night some Mexicans. They were asking if a blonde guy in a suit stopped by.”

Woolston and Krake looked at one another. Woolston licked his lips,[21] “Mexcians, huh? *Was* there a man in a suit that happened by?” The tomboy nods, “Sure was. Another weirdo. Funny thing is, I feel like he came in following some other guys.” Krake sighs, “A lot of men on the move it seems.” Woolston agreed, “Yea. For the record, what is your name, Miss?” The tomboy smiles, “Danielle. Danielle Gavilovski.” “The motel wouldn’t happen to have a camera for the lobby, would it?”

Taking to behind the counter, Woolston was offered the computer, “The Mexicans must have known there was a camera inside. They poked around outside before I talked to them there. The

[21] It was getting tastier now.

others though…" Woolston felt his heart rate pick up when he saw him, "Yea. Yea, that's Mike." "Don't know the big guy?" Krake asked. "Oh I do," Danielle said. Woolston lifted a brow, "Who is he?" Danielle cracked her knuckles as she explained, "That's Jeffrey Og'ler. He's a butcher downtown. I think. He comes here with chicks once in a while." "Baby chickens?" Woolston asked. "Detective, no," Krake said. "Oh, right. It's a motel.[22] Hm. I've never heard of this Og'ler guy before." Danielle tilts his head, "He's kind of shady from what *I* hear. Lately he's been working with a partner with a less than stellar profile. They call'em Z." Woolston licked his lips again, "No kidding? I know all about Z." "Enlighten me," Krake said. "Typical punk," Woolston answered, "gets taken to the precinct for some petty crime here and there. I've never met the guy but I hear the stories. He's small-time." Woolston looked back to the computer screen, "Look at that, Krake. I can see the van they're getting into through the window. We got us another plate to run."

"Sophia," Woolston said, back in Krake's car, once again on his radio, "need another plate for you to run." "Detective, we already have our suspect's name," Krake said. "I can still run the plate if you want," Sophia said. "No, now I feel stupid," Woolston grumbled, "just, see if there's an address for a Jeffrey Og'ler." "One moment,"

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[22] Motels are where strangers are alleged to practician sex.

Sophia lied, as it took a few. “Two addresses. One downtown and the other is on Royal Road, could be his childhood address but it’s in his name now.” Woolston groaned, “Ugh, that shit hole Royal Road? Don’t even get me started on that dump. All cluttered and cramped and the people there are all a bunch of mouth breathers.” Krake begins to frown, “Detective…I live on Royal Road.” Woolston’s eyes bulge wide open, “Ah! N-not you, Inspector! You’re a fine citizen. Uh, let’s try there first. My gut tells me our butcher friend might treat that address like a hideout for this shady business side he has.” “Of course,” Sophia said, “you’ll be looking for 42 Royal Road.”

As they drove through the guttural dump that was Royal Road, Krake spoke up, “Detective, I know you were only doing damage control, but I appreciate the fine citizen comment.” Woolston blushed, “Ah, forget about it. You’re alright in my book, Krake.” It only lasted for a moment, but Krake let a smile slip on his face, “Thank you… Detective- Woolston. May I ask what happened with your previous partner? I know you don’t like to talk about it but…” “I don’t like to talk about it,” Woolston said, “but I will. For you, Inspector. It’s a sad story about loss. One that still hurts my poor, stupid heart…” “Were they killed?” “Wha? No! Jesus, that’s morbid, Krake! They got a better job in private security. Fucking asshole. *Fuck them*! Not you, though, Krake. You’re the good

kind of partner." Krake looked away then and fixed his tie in a proud manner.[23]

They pulled up to an old cabin, away from the rest of the rundown houses of Royal Road. A lake was in the back. Ice featuring several cracks. Smoke came from the chimney, "Someone's home," Krake said. The white van was parked to the side of the cabin. They knocked on the door. No answer, save for the various loud noises ignoring them from inside. "Hello?" Woolston called out. "Detective," Krake pointed to the muffler of the van which looked to be caked in either transmission fluid or blood. They tried the door. It was open. The door opened, knocking over a novelty inflatable ax that only made them more suspicious. Entering the cabin they found the TV in the living room was blasting on high volume the news. Chester Colt sounded like he was screaming, "We are confirming now that the announcement of the much anticipated Project PP will occur to-" Woolston switched off the TV.

"*WHAT'S NEW PUSSYCAT!?*" They jumped toward the door in the back. The sound of something slamming on the ground followed by, "*WOAH WOAH OH-WOAH!*" "Think Tom Jones is down there?" Woolston asked, reaching for his gun, as more ruckus joined the music. "No," Krake said, taking out his own gun. They opened the door to the basement where the music was blaring from.

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[23] He was happy.

“I’ll go first,” Woolston said, gulping as looked down the dark steps. Creeping his way down as Krake kept watch, Woolston reached the floor of the basement, discovering a scene of horror. “Oh my God…”

The first thing he saw was the broad back of the large body, sporting inhuman *pig* ears from its bald head. There was no time to rationalize what the hell that was though. Woolston had already flashed his eyes and made eye contact with the woman with the gag in her mouth, chained and strung up by the wrists. Big eyes. Wet from crying. Crying silently for help while the hands trembled. Ari, Woolston knew at once. Next, between the big feller and the washing machine was the third body. A man in a green jacket, complete with a red ball gagged in his mouth. Wide eyes. A little less wet. His wrists were bound and his ankle chained to the floor. His pants were on top of the washing machine. He wasn’t as smart as Ari. As soon as he spotted Woolston he began to scream the gag for life. But then there was Tom Jones in this little rape dungeon. “*YOU AND YOUR PUSSYCAT NOSE!*”

The guy on the ground was giving Woolston away. “Fuck,” Woolston aimed his gun at the big one, “Police! Freeze!” The big one had to be Og’ler, Woolston thought, “Jeffrey!” Og’ler wasn’t turning around despite the muffled screams from the guy on the ground or Woolston’s orders. Og’ler went to unchain Ari by the wrists. She looked

away, with her big watery eyes, to Woolston. Og'ler caught on then. Or at least mid-way through his turn around. He was turned half way to Woolston, showing off his pig snout. Does he see me? Did he figure out someone's here? Or is just going through something in his head? Fuck, which is it? Does he know I'm here or not? "*WHAT'S NEW PUSSYCAT!? WOAH WOAH OH WOAH!*"

Og'ler turned his back away to Woolston. Bullshit! "BACK AWAY! I KNOW YOU CAN HEAR ME!" "The hell is going on down there," Krake said, taking a step down the stairs. The guy on the ground was flopping around like a fish, muffling out something "*Hhht! Hhht!*" Og'ler's massive arm reached toward the washing machine, back awkwardly still facing Woolston and the just arriving Krake. *Snatch*! Og'ler whipped up a mop out from between the wall and the washing machine and darted off into a back room. "HEY," Woolston cried, stepping further into the room as the chained up victims cried in unison. *"PUSSYCAT, PUSSCAY, I-*" *Click!* The lights blacked out in the basement. *"LOVE Y-O-U-U-U!*" "Gah, fuck!" Woolston blurted as he was left in the darkness.

"I've a light," Krake said, shining it narrowly into the room, letting it linger on Ari and then the door. Woolston kept his gun out as he headed for the door, waving Krake to lower the light, "Ah, shit…" Bracing for the worst, Woolston enters the world of darkness beyond the curtains of

the basement passage, gun out, no clue what he had it aimed on. "*WOAH WOAH WOAH!*" Fucking Tom Jones, Woolston thought as he felt his gun trembled in his sweaty hands. He was flashing it from one unseen corner to the next, waiting for one shadowy figure to finally move and reveal itself as his suspect.

"It's going to be okay, it's going to…detective, don't go far," Krake called back from the other room. Suddenly it felt like Woolston was out in the night of the antarctic. His teeth were chattering, giving himself away in the dark. Wait. Giving himself away! *SNAP!* The sound of something snapping! Directly behind Woolston. He flung around to a corner yet considered and tried to steady his gun. Where!? Where was he coming from!? Which figure among the gallery of shadows was Og'ler!? In his panic, they *all* seemed to be moving. Yet in the panic was the gift of desperation. Fuck it! *BANG! "*Detective*!"* Krake ran into the next room and shined his light on a large man wearing a pig mask, holding a broken in half mop as a makeshift weapon with one hand, and a grazed wound on his bloody hip with another. "Drop it, piggy." A moment of tension. Then the sweetest sound Woolston heard in a long time. *Clap.* The mop hit the ground. "*You and your pussycat eyes…woah-oh-woah!*"

Woolston was a flustered, red faced mess, catching his breath in the opened car seat of Krake's car. The other patrol cars were parked

behind the van, already officers taking photos of the muffler. Angels Boswell approached Woolston with a fresh coffee for him, “Heard you shot a pig today, Wooly. You weren’t aiming for the mirror, were you?” Woolston took the coffee, not finding the remark very funny, “Fucker didn’t even yelp when I nipped him.” “Well,” Angels chuckled, “no bacon for you tonight.” Woolston took a sip of his black[24] coffee, “Yea, I’m just glad nobody has been seriously hurt out of all of this.” Krake ran out of the cabin then, “Detective! They talked!” Woolston jumped up from his seat, “What? Already!?” Krake nodded, “Tch, yea! It’s Frank. They were hired by him. Some kind of coverup at Wells Fargo.”

“Wells Fargo,” Woolston repeated. A cover up? Or a recovery? Forty grand. Frank. Wells Fargo. “Wells Fargo,” Woolston cried out again, racing around to the passenger side of the vehicle, “Come on, Krake. I don’t want pork tonight, but maybe we can catch a weasel at work!”

[24] The coffee Judas ordered at the last supper.

Mike Four

Mike had been looking deep into the dark eyes of the thief when he took the check but little was given in expression. Forty grand had been given though upon his capture. The thief had played his hand poorly in his ultimate arrest by Mike. He fared better in the only game that mattered. When Mike brought forth the rock, the thief answered with paper. Though it occurred to Mike that perhaps this was the thief merely holding up their hand, as to block what might have been a blow to the skull. But no blow to the skull was needed as far as Mike saw. He won the round. Check in hand, the temple before him, Mike entered with a personal purpose in mind. There was confession to be had.

The lobby was cold and empty. Mike advanced up the stairs in search of the court's king. Making his grand entrance, Mike kicked open the door to the manager's office. The door swung open from the kick and its sudden swing made the two men in the room jump to their feet. The shorter man with curly hair was known to Mike. He was the one called Card. The geezer he didn't know. Yet both were to be held accountable.

The geezer reached for a bottle of pills and took them up in hand. Mike slapped the bottle out of the geezer's veiny grasp. Kept his fine leather shoe atop the fallen bottle before the geezer could

gather it or his own composure. Red faced, sweating, the geezer grabbed his chest and was soon on the ground, writhing in a pain that no longer registered to Mike. Card moved closer to the wall, away from either of the men. Though Mike's eyes were on the geezer, his questions were for the short man.

There were others sent after the check. Why?

We–*he* thought our chances of getting it back would be higher.

I was enough.

The check was placed on the desk in the room. The geezer continued to writhe, a pale foam beset at his lips. Card's eyes were on the check. Mike could feel the gaze on the simple piece of paper. His eyes, however, remained on the geezer.

Your Mexican friends attacked me.

I didn't think there would be trouble.

Too many cooks will spoil the taco.

I'm sorry. Card had to swallow the fear in his throat to speak again. Are you going to give me a wedgie?

Mike spun around the long way to stare into Card's own fear stricken eyes. That all depends. Do you wipe?

The sun had risen with a morning blueness in the east. A new day found Mike in a new car. He was well away from Wells Fargo, having done his errands, prodding through what papers he needed,

when a new call came to him. This time from the dark angel.

You better not be in Wells Fargo, the dark angel said, the police are on their way.

I've already left. You need not worry about your children any longer. I'll be gone from this city soon.

Can't say it was a pleasure.

I'll be back, Mike had said. He was turning into the parking lot where the crowd was gathering for the reveal. Wells Fargo would come for him but this he was counting on. He was smiling, I'll always come back.

Frank Eight

By the time Frank made it inside the Wells Fargo bank, his heart, had begun to settle, though other nasty emotions were swarming through his head. It never occurred to him he should just destroy the check, but now he wished he did, just so he was the one to do it. Now he was in the bank, and somewhere in it, Mike had dropped it off, no doubt making him look like a total idiot, and a crook. “Evil bastard” Frank cursed, kicking at the shiny, black floor of the interior. Vengeance was all Frank could think of now, against Mike, against Z and Og, against Hairy for being a terrible butler. It could have gone so easy if everyone else wasn’t so stupid, Frank was sure. Lastly there was Daddy Dearest. Looking him in the eye was hard enough as it was. Enough time had passed and Frank was still moping around inside, as the sun rose into the morning sky, and people entered the bank to start the day.

Knowing he had come so close to winning hurt Frank. It was going to take all his wit to come up with a good story, depending who came asking. Looking on the bright side, Frank realized, the check *did*, in fact, make it back to where it needed to be. Losing his cool again, Frank remembered it was *supposed* to be his big win. “Right when I was just outside the front doors” Frank moans as he

wanders the halls, waiting for Card to pop out and rip his head off, but Card never comes.

Bumbling, around a corner, Frank spots none other than the resident janitor, Jason. Jason was busy mopping the hallway floor when Frank waves him down “Psst! Jason! Hey, over here!” Jason sees Frank and heads over to him down the hall “Frank. What is it? You look like you’ve seen a ghost” said Jason. Frank frowns “They sent the tax man, Jason! He chased me across town and he took the check from me!” Jason seemed surprised “I’m surprised, you got the check back but then you lost it?” Frank nods “Yes, an agent from Wells Fargo no less. He got me right out in the front then walked through the front doors! Hmpf!” Frank slams his fist against the wall with moderate force.

Jason strokes his beard “I see. Well, hey, I wouldn’t be upset, Frank. In fact, it’s great that it worked out this way. The check still made it back to Wells Fargo. Plus, sounds like you just handed it off to someone who works here when you got to the front doors. On paper, I’d say you were the one to turn it in. Everything is balanced at the end of the day and everyone is just fine” Jason smiles “You should be fine, Frank” This made Frank smile too “Heh, you know, when you put it like that…”

It was almost rainbows and sunshine. Almost. “There you are!” Frank and Jason turn around. From the way Frank had come was Bineville, walking with the rage of a thousand

accountants “Frank” Bineville hisses “Oh, Mr. Bineville ha-ha hello, how are you?” “How am I?” Bineville asks “*How am I*? Oh peachy, Frank. Just peachy. Or rather I would be if I didn’t just read my email. Management is aware of the variance, Frank, and so am I” Oh no, Frank thought “Oh no” “Oh yes! We might have secured that little slip up of yours but that’s not all. I went through the files. You haven’t been filing away anything in the past couple days, have you!? We’re completely compromised in our accounts because of you. As if India wasn’t eating us alive already. If this got out *all* our jobs would be moving there. No, I won’t allow you to make a mockery of this bank, of my work here. I don’t know what management is planning on doing over your *little* variance but wait until I tell them what you’ve been doing to our books.”

“Hang on, man” Jason said “everything is all cool already. You don’t need to go in tearing the guy down. Besides, he’s really sorry as it is” said Jason. “No, I’m not” Frank said “the problem is taken of, so there’s nothing to be sorry for ha-ha” Frank chuckles. Bineville wags his finger “Everything is not fine. I just said all our papers are fudged. All the papers you would have had. You slipped up and you’re dead for it. Now, I shouldn’t even be here, so I’d rather make my case quickly” Bineville said, barging forward through Frank and Jason. “You need to get laid, Bineville” Jason said “Never! It’s a part of my character”

Bineville explained “Now if you’ll excuse me, I have a tight schedule to keep. My cat has feline autism and if I’m not home in time to feed her, she’ll shit everywhere in defiance.”

As Bineville stormed off down the hall toward Card’s office, Frank pleaded with Jason with a distressed whisper “Hurry, go stop him!” “Huh? What do you want me to do?” “*Kill him*.” “I’m not going to kill him, Frank!” “If he bad mouths me to Mr. Card then I’ll get-” “*Hyup*!” They looked over as they heard Bineville cry out, slipping on the wet floor, and being flung up in the air before landing down to the ground with a dire sounding *thud*. Awkwardly, Frank and Jason stare at Bineville, unmoving on the freshly mopped floor.

Frank stammered out a confused “Uh” Jason ran down the hall and Frank followed. “Is he…you know?” Frank asked, not knowing what the state of Bineville was. “Shit, fuck” Jason cursed as he crouched down, still clinging to his mop. “Well!? Is he okay?” He demanded to know. “Fuck, no! He’s not okay, Frank! There’s a lot of blood!” Jason cried. Frank walks around to the other side of the laid out Bineville “Let me see.”

Bending down next to Jason, Frank looks over the still Bineville. Blood was pooling out from his head. Frank nodded at Jason to take a closer look at the wound “Maybe it’s not that bad” Frank muses as Jason lifts Bineville partially over by the shoulder, revealing the caved-in crater

wound that was formerly a large portion of Bineville's forehead. Bits of bones and brain gushed out of his gruesome wound, bright blood leaking directly into his opened and lifeless eyes "Oh God" Jason cried like a girl, letting go of the body. Both men leapt up to the wall as the dead accountant oozed more and more blood onto the floor.

The two stood dead silent, frozen like ice, for a moment. Then Frank swooshed quickly to face Jason "Jason! You gotta help me get rid of the body!" "What!? Get rid of? W-we can't…it was an accident!" Jason cried. "Yea, an accident YOU caused from leaving the floor all wet with your mop there!" Frank yelled. "B-but I only left it like that because you called me over" Jason said. Frank wasn't having it "Listen here! If we get blamed for this guy's death we'll get fired and if I get fired my daddy will be mad at me!" Tears were forming in Jason's eyes "What are your priorities! This was a human being! He's dead because-" "Don't say we, Jason. The only *we* is us getting rid of the evidence" Frank said. Jason sniffled "Ah, oh God. Okay. But, how?" Frank smiled as he looked at the fresh corpse on the floor "I think I have an idea."

Woolston Seven

They rolled into the Wells Fargo parking lot like speed demons.[25] Detective Woolston and Inspector Krake charged through the front door with the determination of a racist mime keeping his mouth shut in front of his mime girlfriend's parents. "Woah, uh, you're back. Can I help you, officers?" The goth receptionist asked. "We're looking for Franky boy," Woolston said.

They headed upstairs, ready to round Franky boy up. Woolston held onto his gun, "Let's split up to cover more ground, partner. I'll try down the hall. You hang make in case I smoke him out." Krake nods, "Okay, but don't be trigger happy. You already shot one man today." They split up, Krake heading for the management officers and Woolston for the back officers.

Once Krake was away from Woolston, the excitement and adrenaline began to wear off. Oh fuck, Woolston realized, I'm on my own here. A hint of PTSD washed over Woolston like a girl school coming back from summer camp on Epstein Island.[26] He felt like he was in Og'ler basement all over again. "It's fine," Woolston muttered to himself as he hyped himself up for the worst, "Frank isn't like that guy. He's just a guy in over

[25] Someone who moves very fast. Not actual demons.

[26] Ironically the American Girl Scout League is one suspect for his alleged assassination for crossing Big Cookie.

his head. I got this. I got this." Then he heard the buzzing sound. His eyes narrowed and he faced the direction of the sound. A light was on in one of the officers in the hall. Woolston, holding his gun as tight as ever, went to inspect the strange sound.

Cracking the door open, Woolston's eyes shot open wide, as he witnessed a horror that made Og'ler's basement look like a tea party. It was Frank and a janitor with grey hair and a beard. There was blood splattered across the wall of the officer room. Below that splattering was a paper shredder, being stuffed with dismembered body parts, spewing blood out of itself like a blender without a lid. "Oh God, it's going to take forever for you to clean this up, Jason," Frank said, hovering over the janitor, not noticing Woolston's peeking, appalled eyes. Jason was struggling to cram a severed up down the overworked shredder, "Ah, would you give me a hand here, Frank."

Frank offered a dismembered arm to Jason. The bloody knuckles bump into Jason's face, "Ah! God damn it, stop it," the janitor cried, pulling out the arm he was trying to shred and slapping one cold dead hand with the other. "You stop it and get back to it," Frank cried, slapping him back with the dismembered hand. Soon the two were having a severed arm fight, slapping each other silly with the broken, bloody limbs.

Woolston had seen enough, "I've seen enough." He kicked the door fully open and aimed his gun at the ghastly duo, "Freeze! Put'em up!"

“Wait, no!” Frank cried. “It’s over, Frank!” Woolston roared with the full voice of the law. But the janitor had finished jumping up to his feet after this first, split second, and cried out, “Oh God,” while holding up his janitorial mop. The nightmare in Og’ler’s basement flashed before Woolston’s eyes, and *he* cried out, “He’s got a mop!” “What!?” Jason cried while Woolston instinctively fixed his aim on the janitor. “Hnng!” Frank grunted as he hurled the shredder over at Woolston in desperation. Woolston shot at the shredder mid air and-

KABOOM! Sparks went flying as the shredder exploded. Blood and gory bits from within splattered *everywhere*. Knocked back by the force of the explosion, Woolston found himself stumbling out into the hall. When the flung blood splashed across his face and upper body, he cried out in confusion and disgust, “Oh God!” *Slam!* His back hit the wall out in the hallway. The air was knocked out of him and he slid to the ground.

“Ohh…” Woolston groaned as he watched Frank and the janitor scamper down the hall. “H-hey! *Frank!*” Woolston forced himself back onto his feet. He flicked the blood on him off as Krake raced up to him, “Detective! What happened!” “Gah! I don’t know, they were disposing of a body, I fired on the shredder and the blood, it-it just got everywhere!”[27]

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[27] Having another person’s blood in your ear does things to a man.

Krake looked down the hall with Woolston in time to see the two culprits fleeing, “Shit,” Krake cursed. They gave chase and Krake said, “I’ve already radioed for backup. The variance has been recovered and is on the desk but I’ve confirmed another body hanging in the other office.” “By God,” Woolston cried, “it’s a Goddamned bloodbath here.” Krake looked over to Woolston, “Whose the other guy with Frank?” A terrible realization struck Woolston like a drunken father upon seeing their child’s mediocre macaroni art, “Christ! It’s a janitor. Put out a notice!” Woolston grabbed Krake’s radio from his jacket, “Frank is working with the janitors! *I repeat!* Frank is working with the janitors!”

Jason

"Hey, dude, if you can't afford my weed, just hit me up when you got the scratch," Jason had said to the Sizzler of Boogaloo Road. As equally sketchy and bearded as Hartley was, even Jason had his limits with drugged out whackos.

"Oh come on, don't be so chicken," Hartley insisted before Jason could walk down the stairs, "I'll trade you something above value. I-I just need something to mellow me out. I'm too high strung right now so I gotta lose these off me anyways. *Here*." Hartley offered two small blue tablets in his palm.

"Are those-"

"Heheh…*vitamin gummies*. You want a real trip, man? Well? Do you?"

Jason only had to look at Hartley to get a feel for the kind of person who would take *two* vitamin gummies at once. "I don't party like that."

"Hold onto them for when you need to then. When the time is right. So? Do we have a trade?" Hartley asked and Jason gave a long, unsure look to the Sizzler.

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He was back in his office. His room. The Boiler Room. Dropped in his cow printed moon chair, staining it with fresh blood, Jason inspected

the wound on the side of his bullet. “Shit, Frank,” Jason coughed, “I don’t know if the bullet got me when the cop fired or if it’s a part of the shredder inside me, *but…hnng*, oh fuck, *fuck*!” It hurt like hell. Like the flames of hell. They were trying to scorch their way out from underneath Jason’s torn flesh.

“Would you quit your bitching already?” Frank asked as he paced back and forth in the boiler room, “not everything is about you!”

Jason rolled his head back, as he sank from the moon chair to the floor, “I-I should have never have tried to help you. Never should have offered you that weed,” Jason finished with a cough.

“No, you shouldn’t have,” Frank stopped his pacing to say. “This is all your fault. Your stupid ideas. Your stupid friends.” Frank looked over his shoulder as he heard the police yelling ‘they went this way, over here,’ from one of the outside halls. Frank looked down at the wounded janitor with disgust, “Forget you, Jason. *You’re fired*.”

Frank fled through the door as Jason held his wound and groaned. Agony like no other he had felt. Once he was *the* premier smut dealer of the city. Then the internet happened. Now Jason was old and hurt. Alone, covered in blood. His blood. Bineville’s blood. That asshole, Bineville. “Dumb asshole…” didn't deserve to die.

Now Jason was truly at his rock bottom. He reached into the draw next to him. He fished out and held the two vitamin gummies Hartley had

traded him once so long ago. He eyed the tablets longingly. “This is the police! Come out with your hands up!” Blood trail led them here.

“Fuck it,” Jason downed the pills. Two vitamin gummies. At once. He rested his eyes and prepared for the universe to have him. A moment went by. A second.

“I repeat! Come out with your-”

Jason’s eyes shot open. His body was warm. *Hot*. He was burning. But it wasn’t hell fire, no. It was the fire of the universe embracing him. “I’m home…I’m…” as the high took Jason, he looked to the chained trapdoor in the room. He had seen such bizarre and frightening things down there. The stuff of nightmares. But now he felt he was enveloped by a dreamy cloud and the stuff of nightmares didn’t seem so bad.

Not thinking, not caring, Jason took next from the drawer the key to the locks. The police were shouting something again but it didn’t matter. None of this mattered. Humming, Jason took the locks off the chains and opened the trapdoor, “I’m coming home…”

When he ventured down the first time, Jason had a small drop to a stoney floor. A queer underground landscape of pipes and pillars alike in a forgotten passage. Jason did not find this the second time. Too late did he realize he had committed his body to the drop below a vast abyss of darkness. “AAHH HHhh hhh…” his voice

echoed, unheard, as the trapdoor above slammed shut.

There was nothing. Nothing in all directions. A void. Until, a spec from below. A spec widened into a tunnel. A wormhole of colorful fragments. Outlines of checks and dollar signs, of symbols unseen and then-

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“Bak bak! Bak baakkk!”

The Coyote King was leaping from pillar, to legionnaire, to pillar, plucking the soldiers from their positions as the army quickly lost its cohesion in the chaos of the slaughter. “Bak bak! Bak BAA-” Cried the latest officer before the long and limber body of the monster flashed toward the ground, leaving a mangled mess of feathers, broken armor, and guts, as the dust settled. The legionnaires ran from the dead officer while more soldiers were picked off, one by one.

“Bubu, bak, BACK BACK!”

“Bak, bak! Baka, bak!” The centurion knew the legate was right. It didn’t matter how well prepared they came. They had come to the lair of the Coyote King and to challenge the king in his own ruins, his own domain, was to the court death.

“BAAAHKKK!” Another life extinguished as it was flung and smashed against the rocky wall of the ancient wall. All hope seemed lost, the army

was ready to break, to be routed from whence it came. But then-

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"RAaaAAahhhHH!" With a bright flash the darkness replaced the visage of a green jungle, forked with blue rivers. The sensation of falling. The earth grew closer. Jungle turned into a pocket of fields. Fields turned to a ground of ancient ruins. Ancient ruins turned to…a giant coyote? "D'OH SHIT!" Jason covered his face with his arms as he rammed right into a beast like a meteorite from the heavens. He felt the soft and warm touch of fur break his fall. But he also felt the bone snape underneath that fur. A terrible cry came from the coyote and the next thing Jason knew, he was standing over the coyote's body, atop an ancient altar, overlooking-

"What the fuck…*chickens*?"

Many laid dead, but gathering all before the stairs of the altar, were chickens. Chickens clad in Roman armor. "Bak bab ba! BAK BAK!" A chicken cried, holding up its little sword towards the sky.

Then, all the chickens at once, took out their swords and began to chant in the raising of their swords, "BAK! BAK! BAK! BAK!"

Stranded in another reality, *a world of chickens*, Jason felt his mind shattered. "No…"

"BAK! BAK! BAK!"

Again and again, the chickens stabbed at the heavens with their swords. Jason, mind broken by what he was seeing, by what he was *hearing*, knowing the passage of the boiler room and put him somewhere *far away* from where he called home, the broken Jason called out in despair, “Noo! NOO!”

“BAK! BAK! BAK!”

“NOOOOOOOOOO!”

Woolston Eight

Kicking the door to the boiler room, Woolston and Krake were stunned to discover nobody inside. “They’re not there?” Woolston was so sure a moment ago he had Frank and the janitor cornered. The blood trail led up to the moon chair. Then from the moon chair it went to… “What in the Goddamned?” Woolston entered cautiously in case they were still hiding inside. Sure enough, the blood trail ended over a perfectly flat piece of ground. Odder still, there was a small residue of mist floating up from the chains. Then it was gone. Where did the mist come from? What were the chains for? Why did the blood end here? Who was bleeding? Where’d they go? “How in the fuck,” Woolston looked up to the ceiling as if that would give him a clue. It didn’t.

“Detective, they’re not here,” Krake said. “Yea, but my gut is telling me there’s no way they *can’t* be here. Someone was here. They didn’t leave.” Krake waved Woolston along, “Well, they’re not here any longer. We have to keep moving. This way leads to the back of the building. Frank is probably trying to sneak out that way.” Woolston grunted, “Ugh, right. Let’s go.”

Wells Fargo was full of more mysterious sights than just the blood trail that led to no man. Abstract moving paintings along the walls that

glowed hallways with gold and crimson.[28] A glass bridge over a pool of water that reflected all around them. Then the enormous room filled with statues and the streams of water flowing through them. That's where they found Frank. Woolston took aim, "That's far enough, Frank!" Frank gasped, "*D'oh shit!*" He fled and Woolston found in his place an old man. Woolston lowered his gun, "Excuse me, sir!" The old man smiled. He stepped aside and when Woolston ran up the stairs to where the two were a moment ago he had lost sight of both of them. "The hell is going on? This place gives me the fucking creeps." Krake patted Woolston on the back, "Don't worry, I get the feeling we're being led out of here. Let's go."

Sure enough, they chased Frank out of Wells Fargo, and caught sight of him running into the city. Woolston grabbed onto his knees, panting his breath out into the cold air, "Augh! Fuck, I can't keep up with that little shit. I can't see his face. That's…that's still Frank we're chasing, right?" Krake smiled, "Don't worry, it's him, and I've got this covered. You forget, detective, but two out of my three augmentations are designed for pursuits just like this." Woolston nodded, "Go fucking get him, partner."

[28] Possibly called digital paintings? I'm not sure these exist yet.

Frank Nine

Running from the boiler room, Frank couldn't care less about what happened to Jason. At this rate, it was either him or Jason. Though it seemed like the police were going after the both of them since they were caught grinding Bineville to paste together. "Gosh, I'll have to say what a bad influence Jason was on me when I get my story straight." It should be believable, Frank thought. Really believable since Jason gave *him* weed. "Let's just make sure I don't get caught first ha-ha."

Rather than getting arrested by Woolston, Frank was certain, if he could just make it to Daddy Dearest, he would protect him, and make everything, right. Easily Frank could convince Daddy Dearest, he knew. All he had to do was mention how he had actually gotten a job just as he wanted. Losing it, well, Frank thought "He never said I had to keep it heh-heh!"

Finding his way back in the room with the giant statues, Frank heads up the low angled stairs, thinking about how Daddy's money will protect him from the law. An older man steps out from behind one of the statues, a statue of an upside down man with a pyramid for a head to be precise. The man stepping in front of Frank was older looking "Huh? He looks like the Lemony Snickers guy" Frank thinks, and it was so. The older man

was balding save for some wild grey hair forking off his head and he had a pointy devil beard too that made Frank feel a tinge nervous. He was also wearing a light brown suit, vest, and bow tie giving him an old timey look.

"We meet again, Frank" the old man said devilishly as he rubbed his hands Jewishly. Frank didn't have time for this geezer with the law on his hyde, but the old man was right in the way of his path "Who are you?" "Don't recognize me, do you? Technically I am your manager but allow me to introduce myself as your mortal adversary. *Miles MacNaughton!*" Like any normal person, Frank thought, he said "I've never heard of any Miles MacNaughton." MacNaughton cackled madly "Not in *this* reality perhaps. But I sense the familiarity in your soul, Frank. We know each other deeply. The last time we met, you were confronting me aboard my plane within the void, the space between dimensions."

MacNaughton wasn't making any sense to Frank "What are you talking about? A space between dimensions?" Frank asked. "Yes! You see, there are an infinite amount of alternate dimensions across the space time continuum." Now Frank was catching on "Oh! You mean like Spiderverse." MacNaughton frowns "Ugh. Yes, Frank. *Like Spiderverse*. In the last reality we met, I was a powerful cross dimensional warlock! Yet you foiled my plans and the plane was destroyed, sending you and I into the nearest adjacent reality.

A reality where it seems you're the son of a powerful self-made man while…" MacNaughton curses under his breath "Apparently I wasn't a warlock with esoteric knowledge of the higher mysteries in this reality. The MacNaughton of this reality was merely a bank manager who owned some real estate. Also I guess I'm 65 years old."

"MacNaughton, what you're saying is insane, I don't know anything about being from another reality" Frank says. "Oh but you are. You might not remember who you were in the last reality. You're not even the particular Frank I want to destroy but I'm forced to make due. I'm two realities removed from my home and with no magic abilities in this body I'm stranded in, I've nothing left than to even the score, and destroy you for leaving me here! But killing you is too easy. Instead, I orchestrated a genius plot that would doubtlessly lead you in hot water. You see, it was me, Frank. I contacted your family butler to give you that hiring card. I wanted you to work in my bank. All I had to do was wait for you to make some mistake and it seems that time has long passed. Now you'll be just like me, Frank. Stuck in a prison!"

"That's bullshit, MacNaughton" Frank shouts "I'm resourceful and my daddy's rich! I'll get away Scot free! I don't care what reality it is, Frank will get away with it in every one!" Frank yells. MacNaughton laughs "Don't make me laugh! Which I just did. There are realities where

you and my cohorts are world famous writers! Then there are realties where we're all just whackos on the internet bickering all the time. In this reality, you'll be stuck in a prison, going mad." Frank scoffs at this "Going mad? Please. I'll be fine." MacNaughton scowls "Look around you, Frank. You're in a bank, the maddest place there is. The secrets I've learned from working here alone are enough to drive a man mad. For instance, did you know that money isn't actually real?"

Something went loose in Frank's head at what MacNaughton was saying, and how serious he was saying it "What? W-what do you mean money isn't real? We use it all the time!" MacNaughton cackles once more "Is that so? Well, Frank. Money might exist in a physical form, yes. But in actuality, all paper currency, also known as fiat currency, or government issued currency, is nothing more than a commonly agreed upon system for transactional purposes. The truth is, the only value money has is the value human beings assume and allow it to have. We use money to purchase goods and services while money itself has no inherent value."

Frank's eyes were as wide as a seasoned gloinkbanker and his face was ghost white "That…that can't be true…that's nuts, I-I…" Frank grabs at his skull, trying to grasp his sanity as MacNaughton laughs "N-no! Money isn't real!? Aaah! I'm going insane!" MacNaughton grows a wide, devilish smile before popping a pill into his

mouth from a pill bottle “You’re going to *jail*, Frank.” “That’s far enough, Frank!” Yelled out Detective Woolston from behind. Frank gasped, “*D’oh shit!*” Frank ran from the room, leaving the sinister MacNaughton behind “They want to take away my freedoms and now they want to take my mind!? God Almighty” Frank thinks “I *hate* Wells Fargo!”

Making his way out the back of the dreaded bank, Frank made for the city, and looked back to see none other than the detective Krake sprinting after him like a madman “Oh gosh! He’s running at me faster than Mike!” Returning to the busier streets of the city, Frank sees a public transport bus and hops onto the back, gaining a much needed speed boost over Krake. Seeing Krake fall behind, Frank holds out his middle finger “That’s right, loser! I already did one chase this morning! That was enough!” Frank laughs but then the bus pulls over to pick up a group of nuns “God damn it” Frank shouts, making the nuns cover their ears, as he resumes his escape on foot.

Cutting through an alley, climbing a fence, and getting knocked over by a breaking car, was beginning to put Frank in a very bad mood. Yet he knew precisely where he was going “I know precisely where I’m going” Frank huffed and cut deeper into the city, toward where he knew he would find sanctuary. As for Krake? He was just getting on Frank’s nerves. On the chase went, through the ruins of Halsted, then to the

Magnificent Mile and its magnificent riverside view. They hopped boats across the water and on the chase went. This Krake! “Who the hell does he think he is? Who does he think *I* am!?” Frank was pissed and ready to be rid of the pursuing detective. “After everything I’ve been through!? All that I’ve done!?” Frank’s thoughts were getting angrier the closer Krake sprinted to his shadow.

Frank noticed the cars parked up alongside the street. A very big event appeared to be going on. Just ahead, Frank could see the city event center. There it was. The pride and jewel of the city. Three interconnected crystal towers, each higher in the sky than the last. The St. Regis. Crossing the Columbus, Frank jumps the bridge to the lower garden path, the supreme towers just ahead to his left “I’ll make it inside. I’ll get there and I’ll find Daddy!” Frank was almost there. He could catch his breath when Daddy Dearest was busy repermanding Krake, surrounding him with his guards.

The main floor of the glorious Regis hall was decorated in blends of ivory and scarlet. Frank barges through the back of the crowd and the wimpy usher asking him to come back “Damn it! Where is Daddy! I am sick of this Krake creep living in my shadow!” “Frank!” Krake calls out. “What’s the big idea anyways?” Frank thinks as he cuts into the busy venue “He thinks I’m subject to his rules? I fixed the mistake on my own! I’m a capable person! I can do whatever I want! I’ll

show him who's boss!" Frank's mind, partially disturbed from the revelation of money not being real, felt like it had committed itself to the wild side. So Frank ran on, climbing the stage of the first floor event, ready to show Krake just how in charge and free he was to do whatever he wanted.

Frank climbs up on the stage. He looks at all the well dressed people. "Wow, I've never seen *this* many people before. This is like ten subways in one!" Frank looks over and sees a mic on the stage. He runs over to it. Some people begin to notice him but it's okay, Frank doesn't care, he sees Krake, and he feels he just has to let him know. Taking the mic, looking the wary Krake in the eyes, Frank points to him and screams out "I can do whatever I want and get away with whatever I want! Nigger nigger chicken dinner!" He drops the mic like a ganger as the stunned audience collectively gasps at his insane profanity. He hears a woman sobbing. Looking further down the stage, Frank sees a woman in a wedding dress, crying into the arms of her newly wed husband. They were black, which made Frank feel kind of like an asshole because isn't actually racist. "Oh…"

Looking back to Krake, whose face was filled with outrage and disgust, Frank shoots a sly smile, hinting the unspoken words of "Come and get me." He leapt off the stage. More people than just Krake were chasing him now. But Frank didn't care. Somewhere in this building he was going to

find Daddy Dearest and when he did “I’ll be home free!” Home, Frank thought again, shoving a pregnant woman out of his way. Home was where his video games and cartoons and fun YouTube videos were waiting for him. Home. He would be there soon, snuggly once more.

Woolston Nine

"Ah fuck. *Fuck*. Awh God, I'm dying. I'm gonna die, awh, *FUCK*!" These were the out of breath words of the mighty Woolston, jogging in his pursuit of Frank "Lord help me. Shit, ah God. This is," he took a deep breath, "this is my wake up call." Finally, Woolston had arrived. He had arrived at Krake's parked car. "Heh, now way my ass was going to chase after those two knuckleheads on foot." Having run to the other side of the parking lot, Woolston was ready to enter. He would have too, were it not locked, "Fucking hell!" Once again, Woolston was back to running, this time to the front lobby of the Wells Fargo bank.

"Goth girl!" Woolston hollered, stumbling to the reception desk, red face and huffing his lungs out. The goth girl closed her tabs. "Uh, it's Katie?" "Katie! I need your car!" "*What?*" They got into Katie's car, complete with Jack Skellington[29] rear window stickers, and Katie drove off in the direction of Krake and Frank. "Wait, we're chasing after Frank right now?" Katie asked. "Hang on," Woolston said, making a phone call. The person on the other end answered his call, "911, what is your emergency!" "It's me, Woolston." "Damn it,

[29] Before My Hero it was Zim. Before Zim it was Jack Skellington. Dude is huge with goths. I think. Clothing mostly? Further reading needed.

Wooly, this line is for emergencies only-" "Just get Krake's phone number! I'm locked out of his car."

"Woolston?" Krake asked upon answering his phone on the second ring,[30] "why are you calling me? I'm still in the middle of a chase here." "I know you're capable enough to talk on the phone and chase bad guys. I've got a ride, where he's heading?" "Don't be so sure about having a ride," Katie said, "I still don't know what's going." Krake answered then, "I think he's heading for…the Regis building." Katie seemed to spot something on her own and pulled over, "Okay, I don't care if this is a police emergency. I took you in to town, you can get an uber[31] now." "Hey, don't pull over. I gotta get over there, you're breaking the law if you don't take me there," Woolston said. "Technically she isn't," Krake said. "Shut up, Krake! You're not helping." But it was too late. Katie had pulled the car over in the lot of a gas station. "Please get out." "But I don't want to run." "Alright, have it your way," Katie rolled her window down, "Varg! Anthony! I got that cop who's been harassing us!" Woolston smelled a scandal and knew it was time to jump ship.

Not a moment after Woolston was out of the goth girl's car was he set up by two weirdos, one older and dressed in a white robe and the other wearing cheap Roman armor. "So you're the guy that's been pestering everyone at work," accused

[30] That kind of person.
[31] Cabs for non-boomers.

the one in Roman armor. “A very unwise abuse of authority,” said the man in the robe. “You bastard, you made Lizzy cry! I won’t forgive you!” Said the younger one in Roman armor. The robed one crossed his arms, “Make him pay, Roman Anthony.” Roman Anthony reached into his plate of armor and retrieved a twenty sided sided, “Roll for initiative,” he tossed the die and gasped excitedly, “Nat twent-” *POW!* Roman Anthony shrieked and fell back from the blow of Woolston’s punch, “I don’t have time for this!” Katie drove off and the robed Varg sort of fast walked away from his wailing friend, and entered the gas station like he didn’t just sic somebody on a police officer.

Back to his desperate running, Woolston was able to flag down and hitch a ride with a bus. He found himself enveloped by a gathering a nuns who were convinced he was having some kind of medical episode, “Running! I’m just,” he took in an exaggerated breath of air, “not used to running across half the city.” They suggested things he could do for his diet.[32]

Upon thanking the bus driver,[33] who went completely off their route to get Woolston to the St. Regis Crystal Palace, he barged through the front doors and past the wimpy usher begging him for proper identification. The place was in chaos. The bride of a wedding crying, people rambling

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[32] They cared.

[33] I like to thank everyone. Thank *you* for reading this.

about an incentive man saying such horrible things on stage. “Frank,” Woolston cursed.

Taking directions from the wedding goers he found himself surrounded by, and taking a lovely slice of chocolate s'more cake, and then making a mental note to get another slice of it on the way out, Woolston made his way to the LEGO exhibition on the next floor. It was total pandemonium here as well. Children crying beside wrecked lego sculptures, such idols as SpongeBob, Sonic the Hedgehog, Rainbow Dash, and Napoleon Dynamite were sprawled out on the floor in broken ruins. From around the shattered exhibit for LEGO Mt. Rushmore was Krake, “Detective, you made it,” Krake said, meeting up with Woolston. “Yea, took the bus. Our guy has gone off the deep end, huh?” Woolston asked. “Yes, he’s completely smashed apart LEGO Tokyo. Certain remarks were made. He’s getting oddly racey all of sudden.” “Where is he now?” Woolston asked.

“Mommy,” called out a young boy, tugging at his mother’s arm, “why is that other kid destroying all these *other* people’s work?” “I’m *thirty*!” Rang out the voice of Frank, allowing Woolston and Krake to get each other nod, before homing in on his location. The two made their way through the crowd of crying children and manchildren and spotted Frank up on a stage, climbing the first prize LEGO Empire State building. Woolston summoned all the command in his voice when he called out from the crowd,

“Frank! This is mayhem!” Frank spins around off the tower as King Kong would, were he a stripper, “Yes, and you’ll never catch me ha-ha!” Frank jumps off the Empire State building, snapping it two along his fall.

Leaping away like a lunatic, Frank made for the doors at the back wall of the room. He twisted his head back and cried out, “So long, coppers! Say cheese and seethe!” He mooned the crowd half full of children, laughed, and went to exit through the doors.

Only the doors didn’t open. He tried again but once more the doors didn’t budge. A third try, this time Frank ramming his shoulder against the metal door. A small crowd began to form around Frank as he continued to desperately rail his body against the doors to no avail. He started pulling on the handles rather than pushing but that didn’t help him out either. Out of breath, Frank kicked at the door, hurting his foot, forcing himself to recoil and face Woolston and the angry mob that had stood patiently watching his failed efforts to barge the doors open.

At one point, he bends forward, clenches his fists and grits his teeth as he applies pressure to his back “HNNG! Wings grow! Grow HNNG AH!” He gave up in a bid to catch his breath. Forced to face reality, Frank put on a big dopey smiley for everyone, “*Forgiveness*, is a strong word-” “KILL HIM!” The angry mob of spoiled wedding goers and LEGO enthusiasts started to advance forward

but Woolston and Krake jutted ahead and held their arms out. “Police,” Woolston boomed, “everyone back, we’re police!” For a moment, Woolston wasn’t sure they were going to listen. For a moment he thought they might claw their way through him. But then the mob stood back. Law and order had prevailed.

“Leave it to you, Wooly,” Lt. Angels Boswell blabbed when he arrived to take Frank in, “get a grand larceny case and it ends up turning into a mess like this.” Woolston sighed, “Believe me, I’ve been stepping on legos all week.” He watched Angels escort Frank down the hall. Angels was right, Woolston thought, it wasn’t easy cracking this case, but he did it. “Come on, Krake. Let’s grab some s’more cake.” Krake didn’t argue.

Stepping out of the hall with their acquired ‘job well done, sorry about your wedding s’more cake,’ Woolston noticed a surprising combination of familiar faces. “Huh? What’s going on here?” It was none other than Chief Hayes, arms crossed, looking rather disappointed. He was standing right next to Waldun, Card, and Hartley too! “Chief Hayes, what are you doing here?” Hayes frowned, “Can’t you read, Wooly?” He pointed to the sign that read ‘Quartet Tournament.’ “I was going to be here with my quarter,” Hayes said, “but my guys blew me off so I couldn’t enter.” “Same here,” Waldun said, “all my friends had to cancel at the last minute as well.” “I’m in the same boat,” Card said, “I had to race from the emergency room to

get here and still none of my quarter bothered to show." Hartley sighed, "I knew my guys would flake me on as well. I could tell I was the only one serious about this thing." Waldun shook his head, "If only there were like minded individuals who actually committed to the art of the quartet." Hayes scoffed, "That'll be the day." There arrived a pause, lasting for just a moment. Then the four promptly left in different directions.

Woolston spun his head toward Krake with an expression of shock and confusion. Krake hardly registered the odd sight, "Detective, a moment outside if you will." They exited onto the second floor balcony overlooking the packed streets below, featuring a steadily flowing in crowd. The towering skyscrapers of the city sat across the glistening river and above was the brilliant blue but cold autumn sky. Woolston let the chilly ate bite into his ears as he finished off his s'more cake, "What's on your mind, Krake?" Krake looked on toward the city thoughtfully, "I haven't known you for long, detective. Three days isn't a fair time to estimate someone's character. But I feel I've come to understand you somewhat. To be blunt, you do come off as a bastard. In fact, a lot of your behavior is outright erratic from what I've seen and you should probably seek some outside counseling. Or at least stay off the bottle, that definitely has an impact on your attitude. But despite all that, I've seen you are truly good at what you do. More than police work. I can tell you

you’re a good man.” Krake offered Woolston’s hand. Woolston considered saying something a bastard might say, but he shook it silently. With gratitude.

“So now what?” Woolston asked. Krake fixed his tie, “I’ll head back to the station. I’ll put the report together while you rest up. You know there is still blood soaked on you, right? You also shot a man this morning. That takes a toll on a man.” Woolston nodded, “Right. What about Frank? Think he’ll find a jail cell very cozy?” Krake didn’t look amused, “Actually, from what I understand, there are going to be some special circumstances at play for him. But that’s none of our concern. Our work is done. You’ve done some excellent work, detective. I’ll see you tomorrow at the precinct.” Krake took his leave while Woolston looked on to the city, wondering just what special circumstances Krake was talking about.

Frank Ten

"You ready, Frank?" On Frank's side, in the chair next to him, was his smartly dressed lawyer. "Under the circumstances, this won't be an easy case, but as your lawyer, I want you to know I'm going to give you my all." Rabble was loud in the courthouse behind Frank and his lawyer, it felt like the scene he had caused at the Regis was still going on, six hours later. Eventful was the word, all the lawyer types were saying, since even Frank knew most trials didn't occur on the same day a person was arrested and charged with various crimes. As it stood, Frank was very nervous when they put him behind bars, but he was totally paranoid when they came up to his cell a few hours later, telling him a trial was going to take place the same day. "Daddy won't let me lose" Frank says to his lawyer, who was wearing glasses, which made Frank convinced he was smart, and well prepared for the sudden trial. "It's a matter of convincing the jury, Frank" the lawyer said with his Southerny voice. "No negative attitude please" Frank said. "Sure, Frank, whatever you say" said the lawyer. The lawyer's name was Atticus Finch, which Frank thought was a rather stupid name. However, he knew he shouldn't judge, not when there was a real judge coming to the room. In a few minutes, the trial would begin. Snuggly in bed, was all

Frank longed for as he waited for the judge to enter the room.

Glares and mean looks filled the room, Frank could see. “Oh everyone wants to assume the worst” Frank sighs. “Don’t roll your eyes now” said Atticus “your best behavior and an apology are going to be expected of you here.” Looking Atticus over, Frank regrets not doubling down on the legal representative he wanted to begin with “I knew I should have demanded Andrew Tate to be my lawyer, he’s a real man’s man, unlike you, Atticus.” “On the contrary” Atticus said “moral character makes a good man, Frank. Vanity is a vice. Either accept that, or the fact Andrew Tate doesn’t have a legal degree.” So Atticus claimed, Frank thought with a cocky smile. “You’ll just have to do, Atticus” said Frank. Over on the jury stand, Frank spots seven women, four of which he considered cute. Undaunted by the stakes of the trial, Frank shoots over a wide smile to each of the cute ones, thinking “if I can just woo the cute ones I’ll be all set, none of Atticus’ blabbering needed.”

“All rise for the honorable Judge Holden” said the bailiff and everyone stood. Waking up to the top of the bench, Frank was amazed at the sight of the trial’s judge. The Judge was pale and bald, almost baby-faced, yet he stood somewhere close to seven feet tall, wore a scary smile on his face, and gave off the vibe that he had a wicked sense of humor. He tapped his gavel and said “Order! I shall order in the court. Settle down now. We are

here for a unique trial today. Is the defense ready?" The Judge asked. "We are, your honor" Atticus said. "Where is the prosecution?" The Judge asked. There was a silence. Then whispering. Was there no prosecution? Did that mean Frank could go home and go to bed? He was giddy until the figure appeared from the shadows of the courtroom.

A man wearing red spoke with a heavy Italian accent "The prosecution is-a ready honor." Frank, along with everyone else, all looked to the prosecutor. The prosecutor was well dressed with a black suit and vibrant red vest that seemed to stand out on him. He was an older man, graying hair, who fancied wearing a white flower on his coat. As if he was walking onto a theater stage, the narrowed faced serious looking prosecutor walked onto the floor, in front of everyone "My name is-ah Dante Alighieri and I am here to-a prosecute the defendant." There was more chattering suddenly and Frank asked "Atticus, is this guy a big deal?" "Oh mercy me, it's Dante" Atticus said, wiping away the sweat from his brow. "Order! Order!" The Judge ordered "We will begin with the defense's opening statement."

As everyone sat down, Atticus stood proudly. He patted Frank's back "Don't worry, I got this" Atticus clears his throat and adjusts his tie before getting to it "Your honor, esteemed members of the court, citizens of all ages, backgrounds, and creeds. I would like to begin this trial with a bit of an announcement. I would like

you to all know that I am extremely racist and I consider this an important part of me. A part of me that I want you to know about. Thank you." Atticus sat down. "*What*? The fuck was that?" Frank cried. "I'm an honest lawyer, Frank. They *do* exist" Atticus said. Frank could see all the weird lookings coming their way. The three black jury members in particular didn't seem impressed "Atticus! I don't want an honest lawyer! I want to win" "Sorry, Frank. They had to know" "No they didn't!"

"Order!" The Judge demands "The prosecution may begin building their case" said the Judge. Dante begins "Let it-ah be known that the man on trial today is-ah no man at all but-ah rather a menace to society. I ah speak-ah not through the-ah grudge or assumption. I only ask that the impartial-ah jury examine the evidence. So let us-ah begin-ah with-ah that. Allow me to take you-ah all on a journey-ia into what the defendant has-ah done in the-ah last three days." Dante gives a smooth wave for the bailiff to wheel over a paper graph. There were two labels on it. A label with a very tall yell bar and a label with a blue sliver above it. "This is-ah Frank's time spent-ah between video games" Dante pokes to the tall bar "and this is-ah Frank's time spent-ah working for the living" The court gasps at the non existent bar "All in-ah all, the defendant has only worked two full shifts in-ah his entire life. Those two-ah days

is where our story begins. Or rather where-ah his heinous crime spree begins."

Frank leans over to Atticus "Why is he only showing the video game bar? I've watched more anime than I've played video games" Frank whispers "Shut up, Frank" Atticus says, wiping more sweat off his brow. Dante begins to recap the events of Frank's effort to hold a job. He mentions the variance, the hiring of Z and Og, how he let the door close on the old lady right behind him even though she was like only two feet behind him, and how he didn't tip his waitress when he ate out (she was mixed race, as Dante pointed out). The courthouse seemed to grow more appalled by the minute.

"I will-ah now call witnesses to the-ah stand" Dante declared. What happened next was a montage of the myriad of characters Frank had come to cause anguish and ruin in the last three days. First to the stand is a regretful Hairy in a full body suit of bandages and casts, he appeared to be in great pain as he recounted Frank making him wait in the car and going to pick up the check for him "That rotten butler" Frank cursed under his breath as the nurse kissed Hairy's head for being so brave for coming in mid-surgery to testify. After Hairy was Waldun who recounted how Frank destroyed his priceless mirror and how Frank's pants and shoes together were themselves a crime. Then there came the subway twink who explained how Frank didn't pay for his soda. The bench was

filled with all sorts of other wronged characters, including but not limited to upset children, a wedding bride, and a little papillon dog barking things from the bench the court just couldn't believe.

"This is all nonsense" Frank said, not taking the mood in the room seriously "I mean, they literally got kids and a crying woman up there, this is like a kangaroo court" Frank says "For the love of God, Frank" Atticus says "put away your Nintendo Switch." The trial goes on with Dante only wreaking more havoc on Frank's public image. Atticus tries to defend his client to the best of his abilities "Objection! My client did not know transgender people don't actually like being referred to as *trannies*" "Order! Order!" The courtroom was abuzz, scandal after scandal. "Objection" Atticus cried again "my client's search browser isn't on trial here" "OVERRULED" declared the Judge.

"What-ah did the defendant do when the-ah check in question was out of Wells Fargo company grounds? Why he-ah spent the evening carousing with a girl-ah, eating kebabs" Dante said, waving around the receipt "not-ah only that, we-ah did a weed test on the defendant and found he was-ah high on his first day of the job" the court gasped in horror. Atticus leans over and says "This isn't looking good, you should apologize to everyone now." A great pause fell between the lawyer and his client then, followed by "*No*."

The court couldn't believe it, the jury couldn't believe all they had heard. But in the end, Dante had logic on his side, and at the end of the day, he proved his point "That-ah this man, is a menace to the city, and should-ah face new penalty unlike anything imagined in-ah hell!" The Judge smiled "The jury will now deliberate on-" "Guilty" a juror yelled, standing up, while the rest of the jury nodded "we find the defendant guilty!" There were cheers in the court and the Judge slammed his gavel "Very well!" "What!? *No*! Atticus, do something!" "Hmm" Atticus rubs his chin "well shucks, ya' can't win'em all" Atticus said. The Judge points out to the guilty defendant as his lawyer sinks back "Frank! You have been found guilty of theft, falsification of documents, conspiracy, public vandalism, accountantslaughter, and first degree cringe in use of the N-word. I hereby sentence you to… *PP*!" "Huh!? But my daddy, wait, w-what's PP!? What does that mean!?" But it was too late. Already, the courtroom was jumping and the bailiff had come to drag him away to his fate "Also" the Judge's voices booms over the hearts of the men and women in the suddenly sweltering room "all your books will be *REMOVED* from Amazon" down the gavel slammed, and out came the cires of "No! *Nooo!*"

Outside the courthouse the stairs were packed. Watching. Recording. The disgraced and guilty man was thrown into the back of a

paddywagon, but he was not driven far. Tugging away from the escorts, kicking, screaming, sweating up a storm, his voice cracked upon crying “This can’t be right! Do you know who my Daddy is!? I can’t be guilty! I can’t! I can’t!” Ominously, the St. Regis returned to view, though the sun was setting, twilight becoming night. Up the elevator they went, the crowd from the courthouse seemingly following, never were the eyes off of their great spectacle. The man sentenced to PP. With a ding, a ding that echoed dreadfully, the doors open, and more people are found waiting. The escort had arrived at the top floor of the St. Regis.

The top floor of the St. Regis was a large venue, a ballroom of white and black it looked like. As the dragging continued, advertisements were seen on massive screens reading ads like “Bacci Pizzeria” and “Great Buffet” and “Waldonuts” and most ominously of all… “Wells Fargo” in plain red print on black background. Ahead it almost looked like a gathering for a wedding. The crowds ahead organized into two sides. But strangest of all was at the end of the open path. There was a large metal ball. White in color with a red pupil, almost looking like an eyeball. Only it was not a metal eye, it was a red window on some kind of machine. Stranger still was all the backdrops further behind the orb, backdrops of the night sky and galaxies and alien

planets. That's when Frank noticed the large signs reading in bold and flashing digital text, reading: *PROJECT PP*.

"What!? What the *hell* is Project PP!?" His fears twist in on themselves as he spots Chester Colt talking to the cameras "We're here at the much anticipated unveiling of Project PP, where the first criminal has been speedily selected just for the occasion. Any words on your sentencing?" Chester Colt asked, suddenly offering his mic toward Frank "I want my Daddy!" "I'm right here" came the stern voice of none other than Daddy Dearest "Daddy!" There he stood, suddenly found in the aisle of the crowds, the way they had come. Daddy Dearest, in his fine suit and respectable mustache. The entire room held their breath as Daddy Dearest approached, even the guards loosened their grips on Frank.

"D-Daddy?" Frank asks, after the long pause becomes noticeably too long "Frank…" Daddy Dearest says, harshly. Sadly. "Ladies and gentlemen" Chester Colt says softly into the mic as all watched intently "it's none other than the convicted criminal's own father, the visionary behind the trillion dollar project, Elroy Melonbust" Elory looks upon his child with disdain "You disappoint me, son. You disappoint me so terribly. I had given you your last chance and you have undone yourself spectacularly. You are no son of mine."

“But daddy-” the young Melonbust cries “I am not your daddy. Not anymore. I have a *new* son now” Elroy says, and out from behind him, jumps out into the aisle with glee, Card dressed in a blue lederhosen “I’m a real boy!” Elroy looks his former son over one last time “You have mocked me, this city, justice itself for long enough” Elroy gives a wave of his hand and two guards strip Frank and begin to re-dress him in a new outfit “Perhaps not all men are destined to do great things. I see now, some are meant to serve as warnings to others” “W-what are they putting on me? What’s going on?” The younger Melonbust cries as he takes notice of his blue jumpsuit. Elory claps his hands “Your new clothes, commissioned by Labuschagne, so you know it *has* to be good…” “B-but, wait, this is a prison suit! You can’t let me go to prison! D-Daddy, please!” Elroy begins to turn away “Goodbye, my boy. May your example make others wary once they see the first man sentenced to…” Elroy yelled out to the room then “PRISON PLANET!”

The screens in the room all changed to read “Prison Planet” as the room erupted into excitement. The ceiling opened at the time as the shuttle door of the sphere-like spaceship. The guards hurled Frank inside and the shuttle door began to close on him “No, wait! Daddy! It’s not my fault, I-I just didn’t want to work! It was MacNaughton! MacNaughton set me up! Daddy!” The door shut, trapping him inside. Sure enough,

Frank spots a sinister looking MacNaughton in the crowd, smiling. Then the music hit. Clapping to the high pitch man's voice *"Wham! Bam! I am! a man! Job or no job, You can't tell me that I'm not!"* The most marvelous track there ever was, the WHAM rap, had begun.

On the groovy music plays, and everyone begins to break out into dance. Everyone was dancing. Confetti flying as the ship began to rumble for check off. Chester Colt started to get jiggy with the sick beat "We are not witnessing the banishing of Frank Melonbust to Prison Planet!" The camera crew were dancing, Card was dancing, Waldun was there, catering his donuts, doing a little dance of his own. The Judge was there. He is dancing, dancing. "*Hey, jerk! You work! This boy's got better things to do*" the song continues. Presumptively, even Atlas and Z, in side by side cells, are dancing along to the music. No doubt even the bearded Hartley and the white haired Delilah were getting in on the fun at the roof of the flower shop as the Regis sparkled in the distance. Not to mention a Varg with ice pack on nose Roman Anthony at the gas station! Back at the Regis itself, from the crowd, appears the city's mayor. Mayor Farmer was his name, and he was a quiet minority but everyone agreed he had a good head on his shoulders, and he busted the most awesome dance moves while the ship prepared for takeoff.

“No!” The son of Melonbust howled in despair, pounding the window to the boisterous scene outside his spherical cell “NO!” The ship began to shake violently as the music blared on “*Now reach up high and touch your soul! The boys from wham! will help you reach that goal!*” No matter how much he pounded on the window, it did not break, the dancing did not stop, the music did not end “*It's gonna break your mama's heart-so sad! It's gonna break your daddy's heart-too bad!*” Smoke filled the launch area “NOO!” More pounding, more terror, and then he was off. The ship blasted away from the top of the Regis “*NOOOOOOO!*” The ship sets sail across the sky for Prison Planet. The party rages on below and Frank is never heard from or seen again.

Woolston Ten

The sun was starting to set as Woolston stood stoically at the lake. Angels and some of the boys went to pick up his car for him and they spent the day together installing a new radio into it. It wasn't much, but it was something, and Woolston felt he made a good move to getting his shit back together, "Boy, do I gotta get it together. That was quite the case to put under my belt," Woolston mumbles to himself, taking in the beautiful view. The view made him think of Sheila, "Oh, Sheila…have I done enough yet?" He had gotten so caught up with work, so frustrated with the city, he had allowed so much to get in the way. All things considered, the case didn't go perfectly, but it went pretty smoothly. Woolston wondered if it was time to go back home.

He broke his gaze from the water and returned to his car. Opening it, he took out from under the seat a bottle of whiskey. "She wouldn't want to see me drunk. Is tonight really the night?" As much as Woolston wanted to see Sheila and the little one, the thought of returning home still made him nervous on account of what a bastard he had been putting it off for so long already. Feeling nervous made him feel thirsty. He eyed the bottle questionably.

The new radio spoke then, "All units, all units. A disturbance downtown. Gunfire reported.

Some sort of altercation at the warehouses by the St. Regis event." Woolston snapped his head over toward the city. The St. Regis was right there. Faintly, he could already hear the soft crackling of the gunfire from where he was. The St. Regis, Woolston thought. That's where the Project PP event was going down. People were still flooding the place. Whatever was happening at the warehouses, well, he was able to at least infer it wasn't an attack on the event. "All units, suspect involved is reported to be in a black suit with long blonde hair." "*Mike*," Woolston cursed.

He wanted nothing more than to go back to Sheila, but he never had the chance to face off with that psychopath. He wasn't sure he even had it in him to take Mike on. But then again, he was right there. An opportunity that would never arise again. He knew if he didn't go, the police would just arrive late to clean up the mess, Mike once again a step ahead in the shadows. But he was there, the only one close enough and capable enough to maybe, just maybe, stop the fucker once and for all.

Labuschagne stepped onto the stage before you, well dressed in a dark suit, flipping through a tarot deck, "Now dair readair, et eez time fair you to plai le little voice en le bak of our detective's 'ead. Et eez time to choosé." Labuschagne took one card from the deck and allowed it to magically float between you and him. He waved his hand to

reveal the Hangman arcana, “Weehl Woulstan go aftair le madman at all costs, at gréat peril to 'is vairy lifé?” He took out another card, it floated up on the other side, and with a whirl of his hand it was revealed to be the Lovers arcana, “Or weehl 'e return to 'is belovéd wife and child, at last beeng zé fami-lee man 'e zo wishes to be?”

Putting his arms behind his back, Labuschagne shot you a sly smile, “Et weehl be vairy dangairous to tak Mike on, non? Zén again, zat would bé 'is dutay. Or pairhaps 'é 'as given enough to dutay? Le choice eez yurs.” Labuschagne gave you a wink before fading away, the two arcana floating in the air before you.

The Hangedman

"Come on, what the fuck am I thinking," Woolston said aloud, distraught by the voice in his head, reminding him of his duty, begging him not to turn back after coming so far. "Ah, fuck me! Look at me, I shouldn't do this! Losing my fucking mind, I should go back to Sheila. My Sheila…" Woolston looked to the bottle of whiskey in his hand, "Ehh…just one more thing to do, baby. I promise."

Woolston popped the cap off the bottle and downed half of its contents right there and then. He put the bottle back in the car and followed it right up by planting his ass in the driver's seat, "I'm coming for you, Mike."

"Sophia, I'm going after Mike, patch me over to Krake," Woolston ordered over the radio as he drove off for the warehouses. "Wooly, it's a slaughter over there from the sound of it. The police are waiting for whatever's happening to settle down on its own so long as it doesn't leave the warehouse yard." "What!? Why!?" Sophia shrugged from behind the radio, "Hayes wants everything secure for the Project PP event." Now Woolston was pissed, "Now I'm pissed. PP my ass! Get me Krake!"

War Pigs was blasting itself on the car radio when Krake came through, "Detective, what are you doing? Don't go in alone." "This is our only

chance," Woolston said, taking another sip of whiskey as he swerved through traffic, "if we don't get him now then we'll never catch Mike, my gut is just telling me it." "I understand why you might feel that. Just wait for me to get there and we'll go in together," Krake said. "Sure," Woolston lied.

Leaving skids up to the fence of the warehouses, Woolston saw a series of black cars pulled up along the curb down the road. To his left the looming towers of the St. Regis. To his right the sounds of shooting and screaming. Somewhere under the night sky, somewhere under the sound of men begging for mercy, was Mike. Taking a gulp, Woolston charged in with his gun drawn.

It was a carnival of carnage. There were men in black suits and sunglasses hung up everywhere by their underwear. On their suits were little red symbols of a snake eating its own tail. Woolston had no clue what the hell it was, until he was jump scared by one man hung from his underwear on one of the cranes, "G-get out of here! He tore us to pieces HNNG! We were sent by Wells Fargo, to collect our debt…but he's gone atomic on all our assets." The man fainted and Woolston wanted to turn back. But he knew he had to go forward.

More gunfire could be heard. This time it was close. This time Woolston watched the gunman get his gun swung out from his hand with a paddle ball. The ball then hit the gunman between the glasses and Woolston watched just

how fast Mike could swing a man by the edge of his underwear, leaving them hung up on a rusty metal beam. “Mike!” Woolston took aim. Mike turned to Woolston immediately. No smile. No reaction whatsoever. He just dipped away behind the cargo crate there and Woolston let out a, “*Fuck*!”

Running ahead, Woolston found the container was actually open and led down to a turn in another direction. Heart racing, he entered, and made it to the turn. Then came another turn. A snake passage of aligned cargo crates. Light barely spilled in from the cracks, and the shadows drove Woolston to madness, making him cover his own crack on the chance Mike jumped out from one. What if it was a trick? What if Mike was only waiting around the corner and followed from behind? Madness got the better of Woolston, he jumped at a shadow, and fired his gun. The bullet ricocheted all about the container and he pinned himself to the wall, afraid for his life. The bullet passed through his thick hair and Woolston ran on, the cart’s passage seemingly twisting from either his fear or drunken stupor.

Woolston arrived to the other half of the warehouse yard and was shocked at the cargo sitting around, “The fuck are these?” He moved cautiously on as he studied the various large metal balls. The crates littered between the strange balls read ‘Project PP.’ Woolston understood then, “This is that Melonbust guy’s yard.” Woolston pondered

a moment too long as Mike revealed himself from behind. Turning too late, Woolston felt the string of the paddle ball wrap around his wrist. With a mean tug, Woolston was forced to cry out in pain and drop his gun. He saw Mike's cold face and felt a very hot anger built up in his gut. He gripped the string with his caught hand and pulled the paddle ball out from Mike's hand before his wrist could be broken, "Ha!" But Mike didn't look so amused.

Mike whipped out his stapler and stepped closer. Woolston made the mistake of thinking Mike had to keep right up next to him to use it. Like firing off an old revolver, Mike launched four staples into Woolston's blocking arm, "Ahh!" Woolston cried. When he lowered his arm he saw Mike was already on him. Three more staples to his leg. Like hornet stings from hornets carrying bayonets for stingers, "Grah! Fuck!" It wasn't over. Mike stapled one of Woolston's eyes shut, "Y'OW, SHIT!" Now he was *truly* pissed. Woolston's stapled eye shot back open, sending the staple flying. Woolston saw the surprised look on Mike's face before he whacked the stapler from his hand with one swing and sent his head into one of the funny looking pods around them. Mike, however, did not bounce off to the ground. The fight had turned to fists.

Woolston tanked Mike's strikes while Mike dodged Woolston's. They did battle worthy of Bruce Lee and even Jackie Chan, but there was no time for shenanigans. The pain of Mike's

successful hits were catching up with Woolston, wearing him down. He threw all his strength into one last punch. A total miss that left a dent in one of the pods. In fact, he hit the pod so hard its shuttle door began to open. Then Mike karate chopped Woolston in the throat and the detective fell to his knees, gagging and coughing for dear life.

"F-u-u-c-k," Woolston whispered, as the world seemed to spin around him, "d-don't hit me, I'm coughing," Woolston ordered through a cough. Mike did something else entirely however. Mike made a fist before the kneeling Woolston and shook it once. Then he shook it twice. Woolston realized he wanted him to play Rock, Paper, Scissors. Woolston chose rock, via swinging his fist into Mike's groin. Mike let out a cry like a hyena on meth and Woolston took his big chance. He got up and kicked Mike into the pod before punching the panel on the side of the door. The glass screen shattered but on the digital screen above it it read 'Coordinates: Prison Planet.'

Fuck it, Woolston thought. Mike was too dangerous to be left in even a cell. Prison Planet would do. Woolston bumped the back of his fist against the launch button and with Mike sealed within the pod, the ship began to rumble for takeoff. Woolston smiled until he saw the smile on Mike and felt the tug from his ass. In holy terror, Woolston checked his lower side and saw his underwear being tugged through the door. Mike

pulled on it and held the end of it up, smiling. Then the ship launched.

Up they went. The pain of a thousand prostate examinations eating Woolston alive from the ass out. The pod shot for the stars, pulling Woolston up by his very own ass. As the Earth shrank below him, he thought of Sheila, hoping she would find it in her to forgive him for being such a sorry fool. He would never know for sure though. Up they went, hung by the door, Woolston no better than a hangedman.

The Lovers

"Fuck these thoughts," Woolston cried. "Last I checked, I went with my gut, not my head," Woolston yelled, throwing the bottle of whiskey. Over the water the bottle flew before crashing into the waves, away from Woolston's life. Woolston knew what he wanted and he knew the timing was right. Everything had led up to this moment. Romance, family, and love would prevail. So he returned to his car, a dry and dedicated man. Hopping inside, Woolston smiled. Off he went to 5309 Hamilton Lane. "Please, Sheila," Woolston said to himself, "please forgive my poor, sorry ass."

It had just turned dark when Woolston reached his home. He saw the figure of his wife, the love of his life, out front. He made sure to pull over on the road before she could see him. It was cold out, yes. But Woolston was warm with his thoughts of Sheila and the little one.[34]

Woolston took in a deep breath. He licked the palm of his hand and ran it through his hair, fixing up his mighty pompadour. He fixed his tie in a manner that would make even Krake proud and he went to go meet his beloved. He was ready to hug Sheila from behind or maybe scare her for a

[34] At this point load up and start playing *Men Without Hats - Pop Goes the World* for the remainder of this book.

laugh. She would hate that. But she'd love it too. But before he could decide, "Daddy!" The little one was with her! She spotted Woolston first and Sheila turned to see him, "L-Lewis?" "Sheila," Woolston smiled. Little Lewisa ran into Woolston's arm and he spun her around in a hug. When he returned to face Sheila she was already coming in to join them.

"You bloody arse, Lewis, are you back to sleep in your own bed tonight?" Sheila asked, her face a collection of emotions. "Hehe, mommy said *arse*," Lewisa repeated. "I'll sleep in that bed if your arse is in it too," Woolston said and Sheila just smiled. They enjoyed the moment and the night view. Woolston knew in his heart that he *was* at home and planned on being home a lot more often from now on. "Look, daddy," Lewisa pointed to the night sky. There in the sky, above the St. Regis, was a light shining upward, leaving behind a glowing trail. "A shooting star, daddy," Lewisa said, "quick, make a wish!" Woolston just held his family tightly together, "It's already come true, sweety. It's already come true."[35]

The End

[35] And they lived happily ever after.

Need something new to read?

Here are some books I enjoyed and recommend.

Cephalopology by Zulu Alitspa

Chicken World by K. R. Hartley

The Brothers Karamazov by Fyodor Dostoevsky

Call of F. Gardner by F. Gardner

Fallout Equestria by Lucas Bineville

Stay tuned for my next book

Thus Spoke Jason Bryan

A Message From the Author

Hello! My name is G. Farmer. I am mentally retarded, love dogs, and have a foot fetish. Thank you for reading my book.

P.S. If any goth girls or tomboys would like to message me then that would be okay.

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